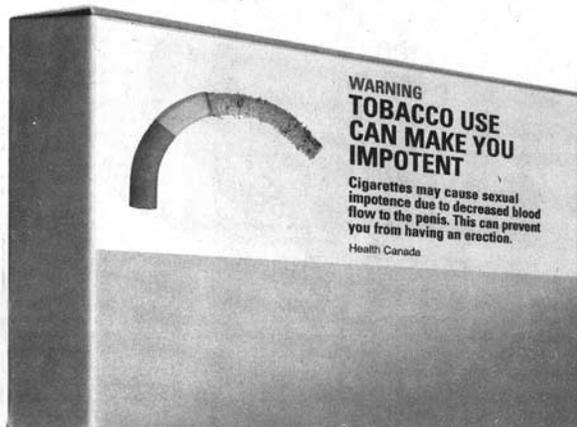


CHAPTER

# 7

## DEVIANCE AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Health Canada's **NEW HEALTH WARNING** messages  
on cigarette packages ...



**It's time  
to see how sexy  
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1 800 O-Canada (1 800 622-6232)

**Canada**

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**Cigarette** smoking has become stigmatized in Canada. This newspaper advertisement, sponsored by Health Canada, reverses the typical advertising strategy of equating smoking with sexiness.

Heidi Fleiss was in her late twenties when she was arrested for operating a call girl service. At the time, her pediatrician father had reacted flippantly, "I guess I didn't do such a good job on Heidi after all." Later, he would be convicted of conspiring to hide profits from his daughter's call girl ring. Fleiss had dropped out of school when she was sixteen and established a liaison with a playboy-financier who gave her a Rolls-Royce for her twenty-first birthday. In her early twenties, Fleiss interned in the world of prostitution by working for Madame Alex (Elizabeth Adams), Hollywood's reigning call girl entrepreneur until her death in 1995. In 1990, backed by television director and pornography filmmaker Ivan Nagy, 24-year-old Fleiss opened her own business. She now refers to her call girl operation as nothing more than a sensible adjunct to many other Hollywood enterprises. One telling anecdote was how she was paid \$40,000 a night by a customer to do little more than play Scheherazade, the Sultan's wife in *Arabian Nights*.

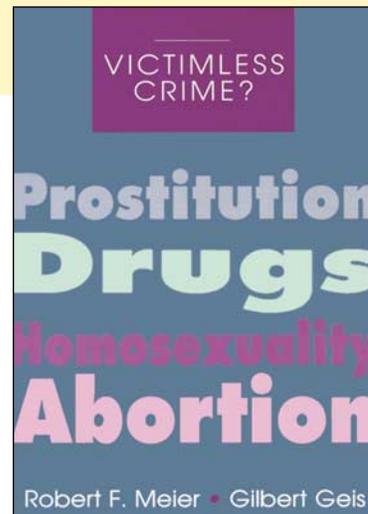
On her income tax return, Fleiss reported that her earnings were generated by "personal counseling." SONY officials paid her thousands of dollars for one such counseling session for executives of an overseas branch; SONY's tax report listed the outlay as a "development deal." Government officials estimate that Fleiss earned several hundred thousand dollars during a period in which she reported income of only \$33,000 on her tax return.

At Fleiss' trial, business executive Manuel Santos testified that he sent his private jet to pick up some of Fleiss' call girls. One of them alleged that she flew to Paris, Athens, and Las Vegas to have sex with clients, and that she gave 40 percent of what she earned to Fleiss. Fleiss was sentenced to three years in prison and a \$1,000 fine after a jury found her guilty of three counts of pandering. She was also convicted in federal court of eight counts of conspiracy, income tax evasion, and laundering money.

In January, 1997, Fleiss received a 37-month prison sentence for the federal crimes. She also was fined \$400, ordered to participate in a substance-abuse program and to perform 300 hours of community service.

Earlier, the California District Court of Appeal had thrown out the previous state verdict and ordered a new trial on the grounds that jury members had been confused about their decision: They had opted for guilt on the pandering charge because they believed that it would result in a lesser sentence than a narcotics conviction, not understanding that pandering carried an automatic three-year term of imprisonment. The appellate court decision further determined that jury members had "traded" votes on the different charges in order to avoid a deadlock, an impermissible procedure. . . .

For some, Fleiss' situation aroused passions that have remained persistently prominent in the feminist debate over prostitution. In an op-ed piece, attorneys Gloria Allred and Lisa Bloom asked rhetorically: "Why is it immoral to be paid for an act that is perfectly legal if done for free?" (*Meier and Geis 1997:36-37*) ■



In this excerpt from their book *Victimless Crime? Prostitution, Drugs, Homosexuality, Abortion*, sociologists Robert F. Meier and Gilbert Geis explore the role of law and social control in four areas commonly thought of as “victimless crimes.” In the case of prostitution, as exemplified by Heidi Fleiss, some people argue that laws on the books create a social problem rather than solving one. Because there is so much disagreement about whether prostitution is wrong or to what extent it is deviant, the law is limited in its scope and effectiveness.

As these authors point out, what behaviours should be considered deviant is not always obvious. Take the issue of binge drinking on campus. On the one hand, we can view it as *deviant*, violating a school’s standards of conduct, but on the other hand it can be seen as *conforming*, complying with a peer culture. In Canada, people are socialized to have mixed feelings about both conforming and nonconforming behaviour. The term *conformity* can conjure up images of mindless imitation of one’s peer group—whether a group of teenagers with pierced tongues or a group of business executives dressed in similar grey suits. Yet the same term can also suggest that an individual is cooperative or a “team player.” What about those who do not conform? They may be respected as individualists,

leaders, or creative thinkers who break new ground. Or they may be labelled as “troublemakers” and “weirdos” (Aronson 1999).

This chapter examines the relationship between deviance and social control. It first focuses on theoretical explanations for deviance, including: the functionalist approach employed by Émile Durkheim and Robert Merton; the interactionist-based theories; labelling theory, which draws upon both the interactionist and the conflict perspectives; conflict theory; and feminist theories of deviance.

The second part of the chapter begins by distinguishing between conformity and obedience and then looks at two experiments regarding conforming behaviour and obedience to authority. The informal and formal mechanisms used by societies to encourage conformity and discourage deviance are analyzed. We give particular attention to the legal order and how it reflects underlying social values.

The third part of the chapter focuses on crime, a specific type of deviant behaviour. As a form of deviance subject to official, written norms, crime has been a special concern of policymakers and the public in general. We will take a look at various types of crime found in Canada, the ways crime is measured, and international crime rates. Finally, the social policy section considers the use of illicit drugs in Canada and in the rest of the world. ■

## Deviance

As we saw in Chapter 3, each culture, subculture, and group has distinctive norms governing what it deems to be appropriate behaviour. Laws, dress codes, bylaws of organizations, course requirements, and rules of sports and games all express social norms. But what if someone deviates from these expectations?

### What Is Deviance?

For sociologists, the term *deviance* does not mean perversion or depravity. **Deviance** is behaviour that violates the standards of conduct or expectations of a group or society (Wickman 1991:85). In Canada, alcoholics, compulsive gamblers, and the mentally ill would all be classified as deviants. Being late for class is categorized as a deviant act; the same is true of dressing too casually for a formal wedding. On the basis of the sociological definition, we are all deviant from time to time. Each of us violates common social norms in certain situations.

Is being overweight an example of deviance? In North America and many other cultures, unrealistic standards of appearance and body image place a huge strain on people—especially on women and girls—based on how they look. Journalist Naomi Wolf (1992) has used the term *the beauty myth* to refer to an exaggerated ideal of beauty, beyond the reach of all but a few females, which has unfortunate consequences. In order to shed their “deviant” image and conform to (unrealistic) societal norms, many women and girls become consumed with adjusting their appearances. For example, in a *People* magazine “health” feature, a young female actor stated that she knows it is time to eat when she passes out on the set. When females carry adherence to the beauty myth to an extreme, they may develop eating disorders or undertake costly and unnecessary cosmetic surgery procedures. Yet what is deviant in our culture may be celebrated in another. In Nigeria, for example, being fat is a mark of beauty. Part of the coming-of-age ritual calls for young girls to spend months in a “fattening room.” Among the Nigerians, being thin at this point in the life course is deviant (Simmons 1998).



The current ideal of feminine beauty in North America is the wafer-thin physique of a fashion model, epitomized by actor Calista Flockhart. In an effort to live up to the ideal, many young girls develop eating disorders.

Deviance involves the violation of group norms, which may or may not be formalized into law. It is a comprehensive concept that includes not only criminal behaviour but also many actions not subject to prosecution. The public official who takes a bribe has defied social norms, but so has the high school student who refuses to sit in an assigned seat or cuts class. Of course, deviation from norms is not always negative, let alone criminal. A member of an exclusive social club who speaks out against its traditional policy of excluding women and Jews from admittance is deviating from the club's norms. So is a police officer who "blows the whistle" on corruption or brutality within the department.

Standards of deviance vary from one group (or sub-culture) to another. In Canada, it is generally considered acceptable to sing along at a folk or rock concert, but not at the opera. Just as deviance is defined by place, so too is it relative to time. For instance, drinking alcohol at

6:00 P.M. is a common practice in our society, but engaging in the same behaviour at breakfast is viewed as a deviant act and as symptomatic of a drinking problem. Table 7-1 offers additional examples of untimely acts that we regard as deviant in North America.

From a sociological perspective, deviance is hardly objective. Rather, it is subject to social definitions within a particular society at a particular point in time. In most instances, those individuals and groups with the greatest status and power also have the power to *deviantize* or to define what is acceptable and what is deviant. For example, for years smoking was not considered a deviant act, but today it is. Despite serious medical warnings about the dangers of tobacco as far back as 30 years ago, cigarette smoking continued to be accepted—in good part because of the power of tobacco farmers and cigarette manufacturers. It was only after a long campaign led by public health and anti-cancer activists that cigarette smoking became more of a deviant activity. Today many local laws limit where people can smoke.

While deviance can include relatively minor day-to-day decisions about our personal behaviour, in some cases it can become part of a person's identity. This process is called *stigmatization*, as we will now see.

### **Deviance and Social Stigma**

There are many ways a person can acquire a deviant identity. Because of physical or behavioural characteristics, some people are unwillingly cast in negative social roles. Once they have been assigned a deviant role, they have trouble presenting a positive image to others, and may even experience lowered self-esteem. Whole groups of people—for instance, "short people" or "redheads"—may be labelled in this way (Heckert and Best 1997). The

**Table 7-1** Untimely Acts

Ringing a doorbell at 2 A.M.
Working on New Year's Eve
Having sex on a first date
Playing a stereo loudly in early morning hours
Having an alcoholic drink with breakfast
An instructor's ending a university class after 15 minutes
Getting married after having been engaged for only a few days

Source: Reese and Katovich 1989.

interactionist Erving Goffman (see Chapters 1 and 4) coined the term *stigma* to describe the labels society uses to devalue members of certain social groups (Goffman 1963a).

Prevailing expectations about beauty and body shape may prevent people who are regarded as ugly or obese from advancing as rapidly as their abilities permit. Both overweight and anorexic people are assumed to be weak in character, slaves to their appetites or to media images. Because they do not conform to the beauty myth, they may be viewed as “disfigured” or “strange” in appearance, bearers of what Goffman calls a “spoiled identity.” However, what constitutes disfigurement is a matter of interpretation. Of the over one million cosmetic procedures done every year in Canada and the United States, many are performed on women who would be objectively defined as having a normal appearance. And while feminist sociologists have accurately noted that the beauty myth makes many women feel uncomfortable with themselves, men too lack confidence in their appearance. The number of males who choose to undergo cosmetic procedures has risen sharply in recent years; men now account for 9 percent of such surgeries, including liposuction (C. Kalb 1999; P. Saukko 1999).

The American Board of Plastic Surgery, made up of doctors from Canada and the United States, released a report in 1999 that documented the increase in the number of cosmetic surgeries performed in both countries. Since 1992, the number has tripled (to 1 045 000 as of 1998), as Table 7-2 illustrates.

Often people are stigmatized for deviant behaviours in which they may no longer engage. The labels “compulsive gambler,” “ex-convict,” “recovering alcoholic,” and “ex-mental patient” can stick to a person for life. Goffman draws a useful distinction between a prestige symbol that draws attention to a positive aspect of one’s identity, such as a wedding band or a badge, and a stigma symbol that discredits or debases one’s identity, such as a conviction for child molestation. While stigma symbols may not always be obvious, they can become a matter of public knowledge. Some communities, for instance, publish the names and addresses, and in some instances even the pictures, of convicted sex offenders on the web.

A person need not be guilty of a crime to be stigmatized. Homeless people often have trouble getting a

job, because employers are wary of applicants who cannot give a home address. Moreover, hiding one’s homelessness is difficult, since agencies generally use the telephone to contact applicants about job openings. If a homeless person has access to a telephone at a shelter, the staff generally answer the phone by announcing the name of the institution—a sure way to discourage prospective employers. Even if a homeless person surmounts these obstacles and manages to get a job, she or he is often fired when the employer learns of the situation.

Kim had been working as a receptionist in a doctor’s office for several weeks when the doctor learned she was living in a shelter and fired her. “If I had known you lived in a shelter,” Kim said the doctor told her, “I would never have hired you. Shelters are places of disease.” “No,” said Kim. “Doctors’ offices are places of disease.” (Liebow 1993:64–54)

Regardless of a person’s positive attributes, employers regard the spoiled identity of homelessness as sufficient reason to dismiss an employee.

While some types of deviance will stigmatize a person, other types do not carry a significant penalty. Some good examples of socially tolerated forms of deviance can be found in the world of high technology.

### **Deviance and Technology**

Technological innovations like pagers and voice mail can redefine social interactions and the standards of

**Table 7-2 Selected Cosmetic Procedures Performed by Members of the American Society of Plastic and Reconstruction Surgeons in Canada and the United States**

	1992	1998
Liposuction	47 212	172 079
Breast augmentation	32 607	132 378
Facelift	40 077	70 947
Nose surgery (rhinoplasty)	50 175	55 953
Tummy tuck (abdominoplasty)	16 810	46 597
Breast lift	7 963	31 525
Male breast reduction	4 997	9 023
Buttock lift	291	1 246

Source: Adapted from American Society of Plastic Surgeons 2002.

behaviour related to them. When the Internet was first made available to the general public, no norms or regulations governed its use. Because online communication offers a high degree of anonymity, uncivil behaviour—speaking harshly of others or monopolizing chat room “space”—quickly became common. Today, online bulletin boards designed to carry items of community interest must be policed to prevent users from posting commercial advertisements. Such deviant acts are beginning to provoke calls for the establishment of formal rules for online behaviour. For example, policymakers have debated the wisdom of regulating the content of websites featuring hate speech and pornography.

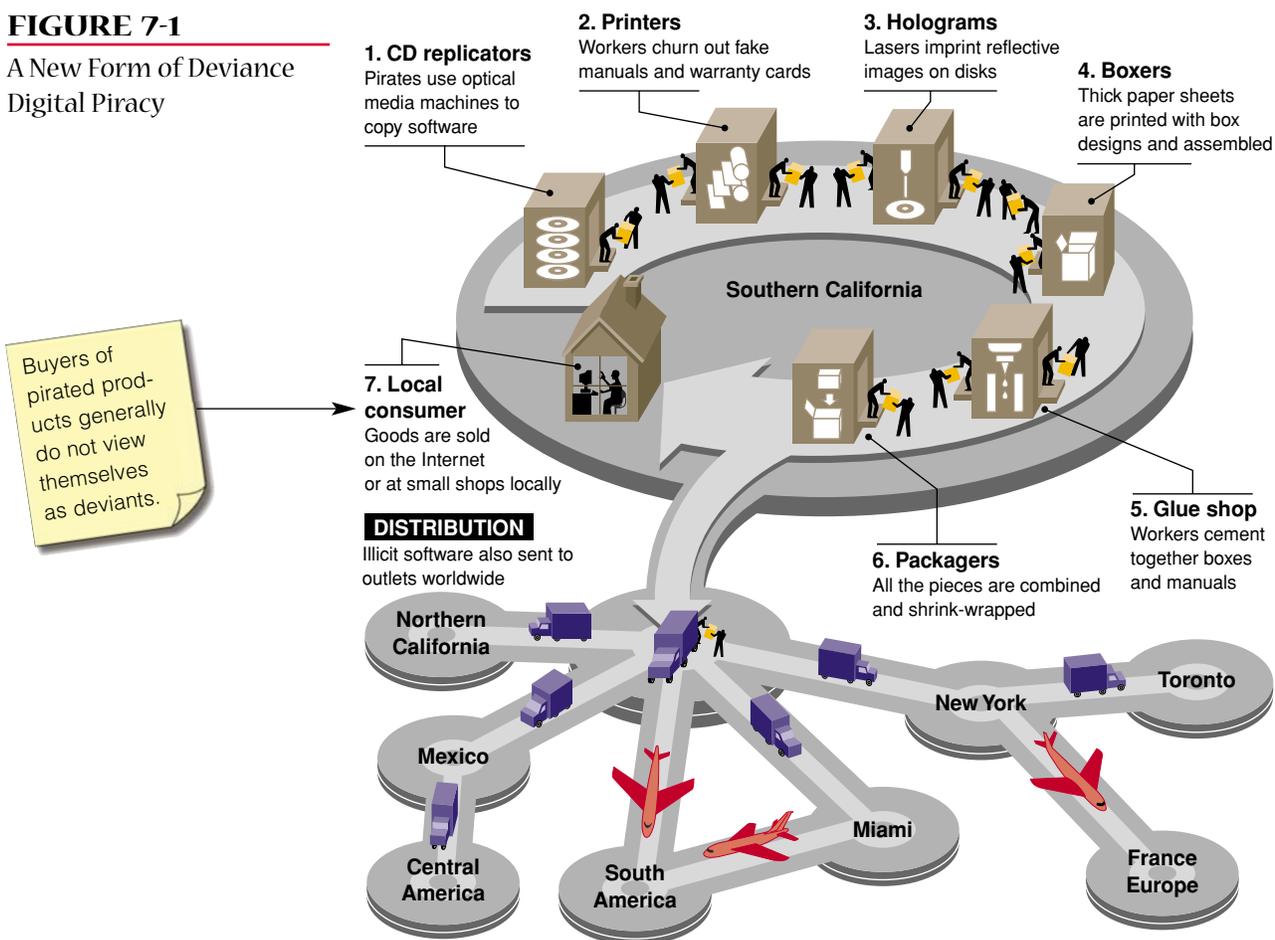
The sheer length of time people spend using the Internet may soon be an indication of deviance. Some psychiatrists and psychologists are now debating whether or not Internet “addiction” may eventually be labelled a new disorder and, thus, a new form of deviant behaviour. Dr. Kimberly Young, of the University of Pittsburgh, has studied Internet addiction in the United States, placing it in the same category as pathological gambling and compulsive shopping. She found that “addicted” users spent

an average of 38 hours per week online, compared with 8 hours per week for “non-addicts.” (Dalfen 2000). According to a January 2000 Media Matrix study, Canadians use the Internet 27 percent more than Americans (Dalfen 2000).

Some deviant uses of technology are criminal, though not all participants see it that way. The pirating of software, motion pictures, and CDs has become a big business (see Figure 7-1). At conventions and swap meets, pirated copies of movies and CDs are sold openly. Some of the products are obviously counterfeit, but many come in sophisticated packaging, complete with warranty cards. When vendors are willing to talk, they say they merely want to be compensated for their time and the cost of materials, or that the software they have copied is in the public domain.

Though most of these black market activities are clearly illegal, many consumers and small-time pirates are proud of their behaviour. They may even think themselves smart for figuring out a way to avoid the “unfair” prices charged by “big corporations.” Few people see the pirating of a new software program or a first-run movie

**FIGURE 7-1**  
A New Form of Deviance  
Digital Piracy



Source: Huffstutter et al. 1999:A29.

as a threat to the public good, as they would embezzling from a bank. Similarly, most businesspeople who “borrow” software from another department, even though they lack a site licence, do not think they are doing anything wrong. No social stigma attaches to their illegal behaviour.

Deviance, then, is a complex concept. Sometimes it is trivial, sometimes profoundly harmful. Sometimes it is accepted by society and sometimes soundly rejected. What accounts for deviant behaviour and people’s reaction to it? In the next section we will examine four theoretical explanations for deviance.

### Explaining Deviance

Why do people violate social norms? Deviant acts are subject to both informal and formal sanctions of social control. The nonconforming or disobedient person may face disapproval, loss of friends, fines, or even imprisonment. Why, then, does deviance occur?

Early explanations for deviance identified supernatural causes or genetic factors (such as “bad blood” or evolutionary throwbacks to primitive ancestors). By the 1800s, there were substantial research efforts to identify biological factors that lead to deviance and especially to criminal activity. While such research was discredited in the twentieth century, contemporary studies, primarily by biochemists, have sought to isolate genetic factors leading to a likelihood of certain personality traits. Although criminality (much less deviance) is hardly a personality characteristic, researchers have focused on traits that might lead to crime, such as aggression. Of course, aggression can also lead to success in the corporate world, professional sports, or other areas of life.

The contemporary study of possible biological roots of criminality is but one aspect of the larger sociobiology debate. In general, sociologists reject any emphasis on genetic roots of crime and deviance. The limitations of current knowledge, the possibility of reinforcing racist and sexist assumptions, and the disturbing implications for rehabilitation of criminals have led sociologists to draw largely on other approaches to explain deviance (Sagarin and Sanchez 1988).

### Functionalist Perspective

According to functionalists, deviance is a common part of human existence, with positive (as well as negative) consequences for social stability. Deviance helps to define the limits of proper behaviour. Children who see one parent scold the other for belching at the dinner table learn about approved conduct. The same is true of the driver who receives a speeding ticket, the department store cashier who is fired for yelling at a

customer, and the university student who is penalized for handing in papers weeks overdue.

**Durkheim’s Legacy** Émile Durkheim (1964, original edition 1895) focused his sociological investigations mainly on criminal acts, yet his conclusions have implications for all types of deviant behaviour. In Durkheim’s view, the punishments established within a culture (including both formal and informal mechanisms of social control) help to define acceptable behaviour and thus contribute to stability. If improper acts were not committed and then sanctioned, people might stretch their standards of what constitutes appropriate conduct.

Kai Erikson (1966) illustrated this boundary-maintenance function of deviance in his study of the Puritans of seventeenth-century New England. By today’s standards, the Puritans placed tremendous emphasis on conventional morals. Their persecution of Quakers and execution of women as witches represented continuing attempts to define and redefine the boundaries of their community. In effect, their changing social norms created “crime waves,” as people whose behaviour was previously acceptable suddenly faced punishment for being deviant (Abrahamson 1978; N. Davis 1975).

Durkheim (1951, original edition 1897) also introduced the term *anomie* into sociological literature to describe a loss of direction felt in a society when social control of individual behaviour has become ineffective. Anomie is a state of normlessness that typically occurs during a period of profound social change and disorder, such as a time of economic collapse. People become more aggressive or depressed, and this results in higher rates of violent crime and suicide. Since there is much less agreement on what constitutes proper behaviour during times of revolution, sudden prosperity, or economic depression, conformity and obedience become less significant as social forces. It also becomes much more difficult to state exactly what constitutes deviance.

**Merton’s Theory of Deviance** What do a mugger and a teacher have in common? Each is “working” to obtain money that can then be exchanged for desired goods. As this example illustrates, behaviour that violates accepted norms (such as mugging) may be performed with the same basic objectives in mind as those of people who pursue more conventional lifestyles.

Using the above analysis, sociologist Robert Merton (1968) adapted Durkheim’s notion of anomie to explain why people accept or reject the goals of a society, the socially approved means of fulfilling their aspirations, or both. Merton maintained that one important cultural goal in capitalist societies is success, measured largely in terms of money. In addition to providing this goal for



According to Robert Merton's theory of deviance, right-wing militia groups like this one in Michigan are rebelling against the cultural norm of respect for government authority. Alienated from the dominant society, these weekend warriors are preparing to defend themselves against the U.S. government.

people, our society offers specific instructions on how to pursue success—go to school, work hard, do not quit, take advantage of opportunities, and so forth.

What happens to individuals in a society with a heavy emphasis on wealth as a basic symbol of success? Merton reasoned that people adapt in certain ways, either by conforming to or by deviating from such cultural expectations. Consequently, he developed the *anomie theory of deviance*, which posits five basic forms of adaptation (see Table 7-3).

Conformity to social norms, the most common adaptation in Merton's typology, is the opposite of deviance. It involves acceptance of both the overall societal goal ("become affluent") and the approved means ("work hard"). In Merton's view, there must be some consensus regarding accepted cultural goals and legitimate means for attaining them. Without such consensus, societies could exist only as collectives of people—rather than as unified cultures—and might function in continual chaos.

Of course, in a society such as ours, conformity is not universal. For example, the means for realizing objectives are not equally distributed. People in the lower social classes often identify with the same goals as those of more powerful and affluent citizens yet lack equal access to high-quality education and

training for skilled work. Even within a society, institutionalized means for realizing objectives vary. For example, a Statistics Canada report found that in 1997 access to legalized gambling varied from province to province. Lotteries were legal in all provinces, government casinos were legal in approximately half of the provinces, and VLTs (video lottery terminals) were legal in most provinces (Marshall 1999). A Statistics Canada report found that in 2001, government-run lotteries, video lottery terminals, and casinos brought in a \$6 billion profit. Average gambling expenditure per person 18 and over in 2000 was \$424, although men spent more than twice as much as women (Statistics Canada 2002).

The other four types of behaviour represented in Table 7-3 all involve some departure from conformity. The "innovator" accepts the

goals of a society but pursues them with means regarded as improper. For example, Harry King—a professional thief who specialized in safecracking for 40 years—gave a lecture to a sociology class and was asked if he had minded spending time in prison. King responded,

I didn't exactly like it. But it was one of the necessary things about the life I had chosen. Do you like to come here and teach this class? I bet if the students had their

Table 7-3 Modes of Individual Adaptation

Mode	Institutionalized means (hard work)	Societal goal (acquisition of wealth)
NONDEVIANT		
Conformity	+	+
DEVIANT		
Innovation	–	+
Ritualism	+	–
Retreatism	–	–
Rebellion	±	±

Note: + indicates acceptance; – indicates rejection; ± indicates replacement with new means and goals.

Source: Merton 1968:1940.

wishes they'd be somewhere else, maybe out stealing, instead of sitting in this dumpy room. But they do it because it gets them something they want. The same with me. If I had to go to prison from time to time, well, that was the price you pay. (Chambliss 1972:x)

Harry King saw his criminal lifestyle as an adaptation to the goal of material success or “getting something you want.” Denied the chance to achieve success through socially approved means, some individuals (like King) turn to illegitimate paths of upward mobility.

In Merton's typology, the “ritualist” has abandoned the goal of material success and become compulsively committed to the institutional means. Work becomes simply a way of life rather than a means to the goal of success, as in the case of bureaucratic officials who blindly apply rules and regulations without remembering the larger goals of an organization. Certainly this would be true of a welfare caseworker who refuses to assist a homeless family because the family's last apartment was in another district.

The “retreatist,” as described by Merton, has basically withdrawn (or “retreated”) from both the goals *and* the means of a society. In Canada, drug addicts and residents of skid row are typically portrayed as retreatists. There is also growing concern that adolescents addicted to alcohol will become retreatists at an early age.

The final adaptation identified by Merton reflects people's attempts to create a *new* social structure. The “rebel” feels alienated from dominant means and goals and may seek a dramatically different social order. Members of revolutionary political organizations, such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) or right-wing militia groups, can be categorized as rebels according to Merton's model.

Merton has stressed that he was not attempting to describe five types of individuals. Rather, he offered a typology to explain the actions that people *usually* take. Thus, leaders of organized crime syndicates will be categorized as innovators, since they do not pursue success through socially approved means. Yet they may also attend church and send their children to medical school. Conversely, “respectable” people may occasionally cheat on their taxes or violate traffic laws. According to Merton, the same person will move back and forth from one mode of adaptation to another, depending on the demands of a particular situation.

Merton's theory, though popular, has had relatively few applications. Little effort has been made to determine to what extent all acts of deviance can be accounted for by his five modes. Moreover, while Merton's theory is useful in examining certain types of behaviour, such as illegal gambling by disadvantaged people functioning as innovators, his formulation fails to explain key differences in rates. Why, for example, do some disadvantaged groups have lower rates of reported crime than others? Why is criminal activity not viewed as a viable alternative by many people in adverse circumstances? Merton's theory of deviance does not answer such questions easily (Cloward 1959; Hartjen 1978).

Still, Merton has made a key contribution to the sociological understanding of deviance by pointing out that deviants (such as innovators and ritualists) share a great deal with conforming people. The convicted felon may hold many of the same aspirations that people with no criminal background have. Therefore, we can understand deviance as socially created behaviour, rather than as the result of momentary pathological impulses.

### **Interactionist Perspective**

The functionalist approach to deviance explains why rule violation continues to exist in societies despite pressures to conform and obey. However, functionalists do not indicate how a given person comes to commit a deviant act or why on some occasions crimes do or do not occur. The emphasis on everyday behaviour that is the focus of the interactionist perspective is reflected in



The graffiti of teenagers can be seen on walls in most urban settings. According to the interactionist Edwin Sutherland, teenagers are socialized into engaging in such deviant acts.

two explanations of crime—cultural transmission and routine activities theory.

**Cultural Transmission** White teenagers in suburban Los Angeles attempt to achieve fame within a subculture of “taggers.” These young people “tag” (spray graffiti on) poles, utility boxes, bridges, and freeway signs in the San Fernando Valley. While law enforcement officials prefer to view them as “visual terrorists,” the taggers gain respect from their peers by being “up the most” on prominent walls and billboards and by displaying the flashiest styles. Even parents may tolerate or endorse such deviant behaviour by declaring, “At least my kid’s not shooting people. He’s still alive” (Wooden 1995:124).

These teenagers demonstrate that humans *learn* how to behave in social situations—whether properly or improperly. There is no natural, innate manner in which people interact with one another. These simple ideas are not disputed today, but this was not the case when sociologist Edwin Sutherland (1883–1950) first advanced the argument that an individual undergoes the same basic socialization process whether learning conforming or deviant acts.

Sutherland’s ideas have been the dominating force in criminology. He drew on the **cultural transmission** school, which emphasizes that one learns criminal behaviour through interactions with others. Such learning includes not only techniques of lawbreaking (for example, how to break into a car quickly and quietly) but also the motives, drives, and rationalizations of criminals. We can also use the cultural transmission approach to explain the behaviour of people who engage in habitual—and ultimately life-threatening—use of alcohol or drugs.

Sutherland maintained that through interactions with a primary group and significant others, people acquire definitions of proper and improper behaviour. He used the term **differential association** to describe the process through which exposure to attitudes *favourable* to criminal acts leads to violation of rules. Research suggests that this view of differential association also applies to such noncriminal deviant acts as sitting down during the singing of the national anthem or lying to a friend (E. Jackson et al. 1986).

To what extent will a given person engage in activity regarded as proper or improper? For each individual, it will depend on the frequency, duration, and importance of two types of social interaction experiences—those that endorse deviant behaviour and those that promote acceptance of social norms. People are more likely to engage in norm-defying behaviour if they are part of a group or subculture that stresses deviant values, such as a street gang.

Sutherland offers the example of a boy who is sociable, outgoing, and athletic and who lives in an area with

a high rate of delinquency. The youth is very likely to come into contact with peers who commit acts of vandalism, fail to attend school, and so forth, and may come to adopt such behaviour. However, an introverted boy living in the same neighbourhood may stay away from his peers and avoid delinquency. In another community, an outgoing and athletic boy may join a Little League baseball team or a scout troop because of his interactions with peers. Thus, Sutherland views learning improper behaviour as the result of the types of groups to which one belongs and the kinds of friendships one has with others (Sutherland and Cressey 1978).

According to its critics, however, the cultural transmission approach may explain the deviant behaviour of juvenile delinquents or graffiti artists, but it fails to explain the conduct of the first-time impulsive shoplifter or the impoverished person who steals out of necessity. While not a precise statement of the process through which one becomes a criminal, differential association theory does direct our attention to the paramount role of social interaction in increasing a person’s motivation to engage in deviant behaviour (Cressey 1960; E. Jackson et al. 1986; Sutherland and Cressey 1978).

**Routine Activities Theory** Another, more recent interactionist explanation considers the requisite conditions for a crime or deviant act to occur: there must be at the same time and in the same place a perpetrator, a victim, and/or an object of property. **Routine activities theory** contends that criminal victimization is increased when motivated offenders and suitable targets converge. It goes without saying that you cannot have car theft without automobiles, but the greater availability of more valuable automobiles to potential thieves *heightens* the likelihood that such a crime will occur. Campus and airport parking lots, where vehicles may be left in isolated locations for long periods of time, represent a new target for crime unknown just a generation ago. Routine activity of this nature can occur even in the home. For example, adults may save money by buying 24-packs of beer, but buying in bulk also allows juveniles to siphon off contents without attracting attention to their “crime.” The theory derives its name of “routine” from the fact that the elements of a criminal or deviant act come together in normal, legal, and routine activities.

Advocates of this theory see it as a powerful explanation for the rise in crime during the last 50 years. Routine activity has changed to make crime more likely. Homes left vacant during the day or during long vacations are more accessible as targets of crime. The greater presence of consumer goods that are highly portable, such as video equipment and computers, also makes crime more likely (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson 1998).



Outdoor ATMs invite trouble: they provide an ideal setting for the convergence of a perpetrator, a victim, and an article of property (cash). According to routine activities theory, crimes are more likely to occur wherever motivated offenders meet suitable targets.

Some significant research supports the routine activities explanation. Studies of urban crime have documented the existence of “hot spots” where people are more likely to be victimized because of their routine comings and goings (Cromwell et al. 1995; Sherman et al. 1989).

Perhaps what is most compelling about this theory is that it broadens our effort to understand crime and deviance. Rather than focus just on the criminal, routine activities theory also brings into the picture the behaviour of the victim. However, we need to resist the temptation to *expect* the higher victimization of some groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, much less to consider it their own fault (Akers 1997).

### Labelling Theory

The Saints and Roughnecks were two groups of high school males who were continually engaged in excessive drinking, reckless driving, truancy, petty theft, and vandalism. There the similarity ended. None of the Saints was

ever arrested, but every Roughneck was frequently in trouble with police and townspeople. Why the disparity in their treatment? On the basis of his observation research in their high school, sociologist William Chambliss (1973) concluded that social class played an important role in the varying fortunes of the two groups.

The Saints effectively produced a facade of respectability. They came from “good families,” were active in school organizations, expressed the intention of attending university, and received good grades. People generally viewed their delinquent acts as a few isolated cases of “sowing wild oats.” By contrast, the Roughnecks had no such aura of respectability. They drove around town in beat-up cars, were generally unsuccessful in school, and were viewed with suspicion no matter what they did.

We can understand such discrepancies by using an approach to deviance known as **labelling theory**. Unlike Sutherland’s work, labelling theory does not focus on why some individuals come to commit deviant acts. Instead, it attempts to explain why certain people (such as the Roughnecks) are *viewed* as deviants, delinquents, “bad kids,” “losers,” and criminals, while others whose behaviour is similar (such as the Saints) are not seen in such harsh terms. Reflecting the contribution of interactionist theorists, labelling theory emphasizes how a person comes to be labelled as deviant or to accept that label. Sociologist Howard Becker (1963:9; 1964), who popularized this approach, summed it up with this statement: “Deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.”

The **societal-reaction approach** is another name for labelling theory, reminding us that it is the *response* to an act and not the behaviour itself that determines deviance. For example, studies have shown that some school personnel and therapists expand educational programs designed for learning-disabled students to include those with behavioural problems. Consequently, a “troublemaker” can be improperly labelled as learning-disabled, and vice versa.

A recent study by three British psychologists underscores the implications of using different labels to describe people with learning difficulties or disabilities. A total of 111 subjects completed a questionnaire designed to assess attitudes toward three labelled groups: “mentally subnormal adults,” “mentally handicapped adults,” and “people with learning difficulties.” The researchers found that subjects reacted more positively to the label “people with learning difficulties” than to the other labels. Subjects view “people with learning difficulties” as more competent and as deserving of more rights than “mentally handicapped” or “mentally subnormal” individuals (Eays et al. 1993).

Traditionally, research on deviance has focused on people who violate social norms. In contrast, labelling theory focuses on police, probation officers, psychiatrists,

judges, teachers, employers, school officials, and other regulators of social control. These agents, it is argued, play a significant role in creating the deviant identity by designating certain people (and not others) as “deviant.” An important aspect of labelling theory is the recognition that some individuals or groups have the power to *define* labels and apply them to others. This view recalls the conflict perspective’s emphasis on the social significance of power.

In recent years the practice of *racial profiling*, in which people are identified as criminal suspects purely on the basis of their race, has come under public scrutiny. American studies confirm the public’s suspicions that in some jurisdictions, police officers are much more likely to stop black males than white males for routine traffic violations. In Canada as well as in the United States and many European countries, the events of September 11, 2001, have caused civil rights activists to raise concerns about the use of racial profiling in safety and security policies and practices.

The labelling approach does not fully explain why certain people accept a label and others are able to reject it. In fact, this perspective may exaggerate the ease with which societal judgments can alter our self-images. Labelling theorists do suggest, however, that how much power one has relative to others is important in determining a person’s ability to resist an undesirable label. Competing approaches (including that of Sutherland) fail to explain why some deviants continue to be viewed as conformists rather than as violators of rules. According to Howard Becker (1973), labelling theory was not conceived as the *sole* explanation for deviance; its proponents merely hoped to focus more attention on the undeniably important actions of those people officially in charge of defining deviance (N. Davis 1975; compare with Cullen and Cullen 1978).

The popularity of labelling theory is reflected in the emergence of a related perspective, called social constructionism. The ***social constructionist perspective*** sees deviance as the product of the culture in which we live. Social constructionists focus specifically on the decision-making process that creates the deviant identity. They point out that “missing children,” “deadbeat dads,” “spree killers,” and “date rapists” have always been with us, but at times have become *the* major social concern of the moment because of intensive media coverage (Liska and Messner 1999; Wright et al. 2000).

### **Conflict Theory**

For many years a husband who forced his wife to have sexual intercourse—without her consent and against her will—was not legally considered to have committed rape. The laws defined rape as pertaining only to sexual relations between people not married to each other. These



In the 1930s, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics launched a campaign to portray marijuana as a dangerous drug rather than the pleasure-inducing substance people regarded it as at the time. From a conflict perspective, those in power often use such tactics to coerce others into adopting a different point of view.

laws reflected the overwhelmingly male composition of government and legal decision makers. Conflict theorists would not be surprised by this. They point out that people with power protect their own interests and define deviance to suit their own needs.

Feminist legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon (1987) argues that male sexual behaviour represents “dominance eroticized,” in that male sexuality is linked to dominance and power. Edwin Schur (1983: 148) expands on this view of male sexuality, stating that “forced sex is the ultimate indicator and preserver of male dominance.” Canadian laws have historically sanctioned the abuse of women within marriage, based on the assumption of male control and ownership of his family (Johnson 1996). According to Status of Women Canada (2000), female victims of spousal abuse are more likely to be subjected to sexual assault and more severe forms of violence, such as beating and choking, than male victims.

Sociologist Richard Quinney (1974, 1979, 1980) is a leading exponent of the view that the criminal justice system serves the interests of the powerful. Crime, according to Quinney (1970), is a definition of conduct created by authorized agents of social control—such as legislators and law enforcement officers—in a politically organized society. He and other conflict theorists argue that law-making is often an attempt by the powerful to coerce others into their own morality (see also S. Spitzer 1975).

This helps to explain why our society has laws against gambling, drug usage, and prostitution, many of which are violated on a massive scale (we will examine these “victimless crimes” later in the chapter). According to the conflict school, criminal law does not represent a consistent application of societal values, but instead reflects competing values and interests. Thus, marijuana is outlawed in Canada because it is alleged to be harmful to users, yet cigarettes and alcohol are sold legally almost everywhere.

Conflict theorists contend that the entire criminal justice system of Canada treats suspects differently on the basis of their racial, ethnic, or social class background. Media reports on the charges laid against Paul Bernardo expressed surprise that a nice, middle-class, handsome man could commit the crimes of which he was accused. The case of Donald Marshall, a First Nations man from Nova Scotia who was wrongfully convicted of murder and who served years in prison for a crime he did not commit, is one of the most illustrative examples of the bias against First Nations persons in Canadian legal history.

Quinney (1974) argues that, through such differential applications of social control, the criminal justice system helps to keep the poor and oppressed in their deprived position. In his view, disadvantaged individuals and groups who represent a threat to those with power become the primary targets of criminal law. He maintains that the real criminals in poor neighbourhoods are not the people arrested for vandalism and theft, but rather absentee landlords and exploitative store owners. Even if we do not accept this challenging argument, we cannot ignore the role of the powerful in creating a social structure that perpetuates suffering.

### **Feminist Theories**

Traditional studies of deviant and/or criminal women tended to examine activities that we would now question being considered crimes, and generally these were linked with sexist stereotypes of women’s social roles. This set a pattern of viewing women’s deviance in terms of either sexual behaviour (i.e., teenage promiscuity, prostitution) or behaviour resulting from unstable emotions (i.e., alcoholism, drug abuse). Often they go together—female junkies and alcoholics are presumed to be sexually

promiscuous as well (Anderson 2000). Feminist theories of deviance tend to challenge other mainstream theories on the grounds that the questions sociologists ask about crime and deviance are incomplete because they fail to take into consideration the context of gender, race, sexuality, and class relations. Of concern are ways in which these factors intersect to produce patterns of, and responses to, deviant behaviour.

As seen previously, the ideology of femininity constructs females in a particular way. Since the natural role for a woman is seen as that of a wife and mother, females are thought to be in need of more protection and care. This is particularly the case when it comes to sexuality. While young men are expected to “sow wild oats,” girls’ virginity is to be protected. Therefore, sexual activity in young girls is much more likely to be labelled as promiscuous (i.e., deviant) and in need of control, than is the case in young males.

Feminists point to the double standard in viewing behaviour as deviant in women but not deviant in men. Socialist feminists hold the view that since gender relations are not “natural,” but rather produced by social, cultural, and historical conditions, gendered patterns of deviance will reflect these conditions. For example, the social acceptability of smoking for women (and the labelling of some women smokers as deviants) has been shaped by history, class, and sexuality. From the 1800s to the 1920s in North America, smoking by women was associated with prostitution and lesbianism. Women who smoked were labelled “sluts,” “whores,” and “sinners” and were considered “fallen women” (Greaves 1996:18). A number of studies of women convicted of criminal offences have concluded that these women were seen as doubly deviant—deviant for breaking laws and also ‘unfeminine’ and ‘unnatural’ because they have offended rules of feminine behaviour (Dobash et al. 1986; Carlen et al. 1985; Abbot and Wallace 1990).

Feminists have presented new analyses of traditional sociological theories of deviance. For example, liberal feminists have critiqued Merton’s anomie theory for its failure to note that women experience both reduced societal goals and the means to achieve them when compared to those of men. Just as women are confronted with obstacles in their climb to the top of the corporate ladder, so are they limited in their opportunities to engage in deviant acts such as corporate crime. Since girls are socialized to see marriage, motherhood and domesticity as their main goals, if they reject the societal view of appropriate feminine behaviour, they endanger their chances of achieving these goals (Lees, 1986).

Social control theory has been applied by other feminists to examine why, considering unequal access to social goals, more women do *not* become criminal. Heidensohn (1996) suggests that it is because of the ways in

which women are doubly controlled—by ideologies of appropriate behaviour for women in society and by their role in the family. Being controlled in both the public and the private spheres ensures that they are likely to be more conformist than men.

Radical feminists have analyzed patriarchy as the key to understanding female crime and deviance. **Patriarchy** is a social system in which males dominate females and in which masculinity is more highly valued than femininity. This system of social relations controls women's bodies and minds, and sets in place oppressive social institutions, such as the family and the law, in order to maintain control. Since men control social institutions and ideologies, they are in a position to define what is considered deviance (Jolin 1994). This can be seen in the regulation of prostitution, which results in a higher rate of arrest and conviction for the female prostitute than for the male "john." Work in this area has included the theorizing of pornography and censorship in the sex industry (Burstyn 1985), and numerous studies of women as victims of violent crime, including the report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women (1993).

Since traditional theories of deviance have tended to account for male crime and deviance, feminists have extended these theories to fit the female experience. "However, they also have highlighted the importance of taking other factors into account, such as the economic position of women and their role in the family, in understanding women's crimes" (Abbott and Wallace 1990: 169).

The perspective advanced by labelling and conflict theorists forms quite a contrast to the functionalist approach to deviance. Functionalists view standards of deviant behaviour as merely reflecting cultural norms, whereas feminist, conflict, and labelling theorists point out that the most powerful groups in a society can shape laws and standards and determine who is (or is not) prosecuted as a criminal. Thus, the label "deviant" is rarely applied to the corporate executive whose decisions lead to large-scale environmental pollution. Agents of social control and powerful groups can generally impose their own self-serving definitions of deviance on the general public.

## Social Control

How does a society bring about acceptance of basic norms? The term **social control** refers to the techniques and strategies for preventing deviant human behaviour in any society. Social control occurs on all levels of society. In the family, we are socialized to obey our parents simply because they are our parents. Peer groups introduce us to informal norms, such as dress codes, that govern the

behaviour of members. Universities establish standards they expect their students to maintain. In bureaucratic organizations, workers encounter a formal system of rules and regulations. Finally, the government of every society legislates and enforces social norms.

Most of us respect and accept basic social norms and assume that others will do the same. Even without thinking, we obey the instructions of police officers, follow the day-to-day rules at our jobs, and move to the rear of elevators when people enter. Such behaviour reflects an effective process of socialization to the dominant standards of a culture. At the same time, we are well aware that individuals, groups, and institutions *expect* us to act "properly." If we fail to do so, we may face punishment through informal *sanctions* such as fear and ridicule, or formal sanctions such as jail sentences or fines. The challenge to effective social control is that people often receive competing messages about how to behave. While the state or government may clearly define acceptable behaviour, friends or fellow employees may encourage quite different behaviour patterns. Box 7-1 presents the latest research on young people who live on the street and the deviant behaviours that are associated with this lifestyle.

Functionalists contend that people must respect social norms if any group or society is to survive. In their view, societies literally could not function if massive numbers of people defied standards of appropriate conduct. By contrast, conflict theorists maintain that "successful functioning" of a society will consistently benefit the powerful and work to the disadvantage of other groups. They point out, for example, that widespread resistance to social norms was necessary to overturn the institution of slavery in the United States.

## Conformity and Obedience

Techniques for social control operate on both the group level and the societal level. People whom we regard as our peers or as our equals influence us to act in particular ways; the same is true of people who hold authority over us or occupy awe-inspiring positions. Stanley Milgram (1975) made a useful distinction between these two important levels of social control.

Milgram defined **conformity** as going along with peers—individuals of our own status, who have no special right to direct our behaviour. By contrast, **obedience** is defined as compliance with higher authorities in a hierarchical structure. Thus, a recruit entering military service will typically *conform* to the habits and language of other recruits and will *obey* the orders of superior officers. Students will *conform* to the drinking behaviour of their peers and will *obey* the requests of campus security officers.

Fiona was a fairly typical 16-year-old, living in Barrie, Ontario. She was struggling to complete high school and learning how to get along with her mother's new common-law partner. Often she and her mother's partner would argue over Fiona's contribution to the running of their household or whether she should be able to stay overnight at her boyfriend's apartment. He often would resort to verbal and physical abuse in attempting to make Fiona comply with his wishes. Although Fiona felt her mother loved her, she felt betrayed by her mother's silence when it came to protecting her from the abuse.

Fiona decided she couldn't endure the strain and sense of betrayal at home and convinced her boyfriend, Michael, to leave Ontario. They drove across Canada, ending up at the west coast—in Vancouver. Shortly after Fiona and Michael arrived in Vancouver, Michael's money supply ran out and he decided to return to Ontario. Fiona, also facing a shortage of cash, resorted to panhandling on Robson Street in downtown Vancouver and began "living on the streets."

Fiona's case is reflective of a general pattern of street kids in British Columbia. That is, nearly 61 percent of street kids in Vancouver are from provinces other than British Columbia. A major report released in 2001 by the McCreary Centre Society, entitled "No Place to Call Home," noted that most street youth have experienced sexual or physical abuse and most have either

run away or been kicked out of their homes. Many engage in behaviours that are considered "high risk," such as involvement in the sex trade and addiction to drugs. The study revealed that most street youth in the cities are not literally homeless, but live in shelters or abandoned buildings or "squats."

Although it is common to view the phenomenon of youth living on the street as a big city problem, the study revealed that, while many troubled young people migrate to the larger cities, smaller communities, such as Prince Rupert, also experience the phenomenon.

**Fiona decided she couldn't endure the strain and sense of betrayal at home and convinced her boyfriend, Michael, to leave Ontario.**

Other major findings of the study revealed:

- Over one-quarter of street youth have attempted suicide in the past year.
- Over half of street youth have been in government care, including foster care or group homes.
- Street youth reported that they began risky behaviour young, many when they were 13. Some of these risky behaviours include involvement in the sex trade,

having unprotected sex, and addiction to alcohol and drugs.

- Street kids had an average age of 16 in the smaller centres, while the average age was 18 for those in Vancouver.
- Over a third planned to attend some form of post-secondary education.

The researchers interviewed over 500 youth, aged 12 to 19, who were living on the street. When asked why they were there, the responses included:

- Friends hang out on street (34 percent)
- Don't get along with parents (37 percent)
- Feel accepted there, kicked out of home (38 percent)
- Travelling (35 percent)
- Ran away from home (30 percent)
- Can't find a job (24 percent)
- Addiction problems (22 percent)
- Violence or abuse at home (20 percent)
- Can't find affordable housing (18 percent)
- Conflict at home because of sexual orientation (4 percent)

### Let's Discuss

1. What behaviours considered deviant in society are associated with kids living on the street?
2. Evaluate the factors that contribute to children becoming "street kids."

Source: The McCreary Centre Society 2001; Steffenhagen 2001.

### Conformity to Prejudice

We often think of conformity in terms of rather harmless situations, such as members of an expensive health club who all work out in elaborate and costly sportswear. But researchers have found that people may conform to the attitudes and behaviour of their peers even when such conformity means expressing intolerance toward others.

Fletcher Blanchard, Teri Lilly, and Leigh Ann Vaughn (1991) conducted an experiment at an American university and found that statements people overhear others make influence their own expressions of opinion on the issue of racism. A student research assistant (R.A.) employed by the researchers approached 72 white students as each was walking across the campus to get responses for an opinion poll she said she was conducting

for a class. At the same time, a second white student—actually another R.A.—was stopped and asked to participate in the survey. Both students were then asked how their university should respond to anonymous racist notes actually sent to four black students in 1989. The R.A. always answered first. In some cases, she condemned the notes; in others, she justified them.

Blanchard and his colleagues (1991:102–103) conclude that “hearing at least one other person express strongly antiracist opinions produced dramatically more strongly antiracist public reactions to racism than hearing others express equivocal opinions or opinions more accepting of racism.” A second experiment demonstrated that when the student working on behalf of the researchers expressed sentiments justifying racism, subjects were much *less* likely to express antiracist opinions than were those who heard no one else offer opinions. In these experiments, social control (through the process of conformity) influenced people’s attitudes, or at least the expression of those attitudes. In the next section, we will see that social control (through the process of obedience) can alter people’s behaviour.

### **Obedience to Authority**

If ordered to do so, would you comply with an experimenter’s instruction to give people increasingly painful electric shocks? Most people would say no; yet, the research of social psychologist Stanley Milgram (1963, 1975) suggests that most of us *will* obey such orders. In Milgram’s words (1975:xi), “Behaviour that is unthinkable in an individual . . . acting on his own may be executed without hesitation when carried out under orders.”

Milgram placed advertisements in New Haven, Connecticut, newspapers to recruit subjects for what was announced as a learning experiment at Yale University. Participants included postal clerks, engineers, high school teachers, and labourers. They were told that the purpose of the research was to investigate the effects of punishment on learning. The experimenter, dressed in a gray technician’s coat, explained that in each testing, one subject would be randomly selected as the “learner” while another would function as the “teacher.” However, this lottery was rigged so that the “real” subject would always be the teacher while an associate of Milgram served as the learner.

At this point, the learner’s hand was strapped to an electric apparatus. The teacher was taken to an electronic “shock generator” with 30 lever switches. Each switch was labelled with graduated voltage designations from 15 to 450 volts. Before beginning the experiment, subjects were given sample shocks of 45 volts to convince them of the authenticity of the experiment.

The experimenter instructed the teacher to apply shocks of increasing voltage each time the learner gave an



In one of Stanley Milgram’s experiments, a supposed “victim” received an electric shock when his hand rested on a shock plate. At the 150-volt level, the “victim” would demand to be released, and would refuse to place his hand on the shock plate. The experimenter would then order the actual subject to force the “victim’s” hand onto the plate, as shown in the photo. Though 40 percent of the true subjects stopped complying with Milgram at this point, 30 percent did force the “victim’s” hand onto the shock plate, despite his pretended agony.

incorrect answer on a memory test. Teachers were told that “although the shocks can be extremely painful, they cause no permanent tissue damage.” In reality, the learner did not receive any shocks.

The learner deliberately gave incorrect answers and acted out a prearranged script. For example, at 150 volts, the learner would cry out, “Experimenter, get me out of here! I won’t be in the experiment any more!” At 270 volts, the learner would scream in agony. When the shock reached 350 volts, the learner would fall silent. If the teacher wanted to stop the experiment, the experimenter would insist that the teacher continue, using such statements as “The experiment requires that you continue” and “You have no other choice; you *must* go on” (Milgram 1975:19–23).

The results of this unusual experiment stunned and dismayed Milgram and other social scientists. A sample of psychiatrists had predicted that virtually all subjects would refuse to shock innocent victims. In their view, only a “pathological fringe” of less than 2 percent would continue administering shocks up to the maximum level. Yet almost *two-thirds* of participants fell into the category of “obedient subjects.”

Why did these subjects obey? Why were they willing to inflict seemingly painful shocks on innocent victims who had never done them any harm? There is no evidence that these subjects were unusually sadistic; few seemed to enjoy administering the shocks. Instead, in Milgram's view, the key to obedience was the experimenter's social role as a "scientist" and "seeker of knowledge."

Milgram pointed out that in the modern industrial world, we are accustomed to submitting to impersonal authority figures whose status is indicated by a title (professor, lieutenant, doctor) or by a uniform (the technician's coat). The authority is viewed as larger and more important than the individual; consequently, the obedient individual shifts responsibility for his or her behaviour to the authority figure. Milgram's subjects frequently stated, "If it were up to me, I would not have administered shocks." They saw themselves as merely doing their duty (Milgram 1975).

From an interactionist perspective, one important aspect of Milgram's findings is the fact that subjects in follow-up studies were less likely to inflict the supposed shocks as they were moved physically closer to their victims. Moreover, interactionists emphasize the effect of *incrementally* administering additional dosages of 15 volts. In effect, the experimenter negotiated with the teacher and convinced the teacher to continue inflicting higher levels of punishment. It is doubtful that anywhere near the two-thirds rate of obedience would have been reached had the experimenter told the teachers to administer 450 volts immediately to the learners (B. Allen 1978; Katovich 1987).

Milgram launched his experimental study of obedience to better understand the involvement of Germans in the annihilation of 6 million Jews and millions of other people during the Second World War. In an interview conducted long after the publication of his study, he suggested that "if a system of death camps were set up in the United States of the sort we had seen in Nazi Germany, one would be able to find sufficient personnel for those camps in any medium-sized American town" (CBS News 1979:7–8).

### Informal and Formal Social Control

The sanctions used to encourage conformity and obedience—and to discourage violation of social norms—are carried out through informal and formal social control.

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As the term implies, people use **informal social control** casually to enforce norms. Examples of informal social control include smiles, laughter, raising an eyebrow, and ridicule.

In Canada, the United States, and many other cultures, one common and yet controversial example of

informal social control is parental use of corporal punishment. Adults often view spanking, slapping, or kicking children as a proper and necessary means of maintaining authority. Child development specialists counter that corporal punishment is inappropriate because it teaches children to solve problems through violence. They warn that slapping and spanking can escalate into more serious forms of abuse. Yet, despite the fact that pediatric experts now believe that physical forms of discipline are undesirable and encourage their patients to use nonphysical means of discipline (Tidmarsh 2000), approximately 70 percent of Canadian parents have used physical punishment (Durrant and Rose-Krasnor 1995).

Sometimes informal methods of social control are not adequate to enforce conforming or obedient behaviour. In those cases, **formal social control** is carried out by authorized agents, such as police officers, physicians, school administrators, employers, military officers, and managers of movie theatres. It can serve as a last resort when socialization and informal sanctions do not bring about desired behaviour. An increasingly significant means of formal social control in Canada is to jail people. For every 43 offences that occur, one person is sentenced to a penitentiary or prison. Of these, a disproportionately high number are First Nations people, who account for between 8 and 10 percent of the federal correctional institutions' population, and even a greater percentage of the population in provincial and territorial institutions (Nelson and Fleras 1995). Chapter 10 will explore the role of systemic discrimination in this situation.

Societies vary in deciding which behaviours will be subjected to formal social control and how severe the sanctions will be. In the nation of Singapore, chewing of gum is prohibited, feeding birds can lead to fines of up to U.S.\$640, and there is even a U.S.\$95 fine for failing to flush the toilet (see Box 7-2). Singapore deals with serious crimes especially severely. The death penalty is mandatory for murder, drug trafficking, and crimes committed with firearms. Japan has created a special prison for reckless drivers. While some are imprisoned for vehicular homicide, others serve prison time for drunken driving and fleeing the scene of an accident (Efron 1998; Elliott 1994).

Another controversial example of formal social control is the use of surveillance techniques. In 1992, police in Great Britain began to install closed-circuit television systems on "high streets" (the primary shopping and business areas of local communities) in an effort to reduce street crime. Within two years, 300 British towns had installed or made plans to install such surveillance cameras, and the use of public surveillance had spread to North America. Supporters of surveillance believe that it will make the public feel more secure. Moreover, it can be

## 7-2 Singapore: A Nation of Campaigns

**M**ales with Long Hair Will Be Attended to Last!” “Throwing Litter from Apartments Can Kill!” “No Spitting!” These are some of the posters sponsored by the Singapore government in its effort to enforce social norms in this small nation of some 4 million people living in a totally urbanized area in Southeast Asia.

While Singapore is governed by a democratically elected parliament, one party has dominated the government since its independence in 1965. And it has not hesitated to use its authority to launch a number of campaigns to shape the social behaviour of its citizens. In most cases these campaigns are directed against “disagreeable” behaviour—littering, spitting, chewing gum, failing to flush public toilets, teenage smoking, and the like. Courtesy is a major concern, with elaborate “Courtesy Month” celebrations scheduled both to entertain and to educate the populace.

Some campaigns take on serious issues and are backed by legislation. For example, in the 1970s the government asked its citizens to “Please Stop at

Two” in family planning; tax and schooling benefits rewarded those who complied. However, this campaign was so successful that in the 1980s the government began a “Have Three or More If You Can Afford To” campaign. In this case it provided school benefits for larger families. In another attempt at social control, the government has

**Courtesy is a major concern, with elaborate “Courtesy Month” celebrations scheduled to both entertain and educate the populace.**

launched a “Speak Mandarin” campaign to encourage the multiethnic, multilingual population to accept Mandarin as the dialect of choice.

For the most part, Singaporeans cheerfully accept their government’s admonitions and encouragement. They see the results of being clean and courteous: Singapore is a better place to live. Corporations also go along with the

government and even help to sponsor some of the campaigns. As one corporate sponsor noted: “If (people) see Singapore as a clean country, they will view companies here as clean.” Political scientist Michael Haas refers to this compliance as “the Singapore puzzle”: citizens of Singapore accept strict social control dictates in exchange for continuing prosperity and technological leadership in the world.

### Let’s Discuss

1. How would you react to an administration-sponsored campaign at your educational institution against drinking? What would be some positive aspects of such a campaign? What would be some negative aspects?
2. Why do you think these social control campaigns work in Singapore? If there were a strong two-party system there, do you think the campaigns would be as prevalent and as effective? Why or why not?

Sources: Dorai 1998; Haas 1999; Haub and Cornelius 2000; Instituto del Tercer Mundo 1999.

cheaper to install and maintain cameras than to put more police officers on street patrol. For critics, however, the use of surveillance cameras brings to mind the grim, futuristic world presented by Britain’s own George Orwell (1949) in his famous novel *1984*. In the world of *1984*, an all-seeing “Big Brother” represented an authoritarian government that watched people’s every move and took immediate action against anyone who questioned the oppressive regime (Halbfinger 1998; Uttley 1993).

### Law and Society

Some norms are so important to a society that they are formalized into laws controlling people’s behaviour. *Law* may be defined as governmental social control (Black 1995). Some laws, such as the prohibition against murder, are directed at all members of society. Others, such as fishing and hunting regulations,

primarily affect particular categories of people. Still others govern the behaviour of social institutions (corporate law and laws regarding the taxing of nonprofit enterprises).

Sociologists have become increasingly interested in the creation of laws as a social process. Laws are created in response to perceived needs for formal social control. Sociologists have sought to explain how and why such perceptions arise. In their view, law is not merely a static body of rules handed down from generation to generation. Rather, it reflects continually changing standards of what is right and wrong, of how violations are to be determined, and of what sanctions are to be applied (Schur 1968).

Sociologists representing varying theoretical perspectives agree that the legal order reflects underlying social values. Therefore, the creation of criminal law can be a most controversial matter. Should it be against the



“Big Brother” is watching you! In an attempt to reduce street crime, the city of Baltimore, Maryland, installed a video surveillance camera in its business district. Some residents are comforted by the camera’s presence, but critics charge that it is inappropriate in a free society.

law to employ illegal immigrants in a factory (see Chapter 10), to have an abortion (see Chapter 11), or to smoke on an airplane? Such issues have been bitterly debated because they require a choice among competing values. Not surprisingly, laws that are unpopular—such as the Canadian law requiring the registration of firearms—become difficult to enforce owing to lack of consensus supporting the norms.

Socialization is actually the primary source of conforming and obedient behaviour, including obedience to law. Generally, it is not external pressure from a peer group or authority figure that makes us go along with social norms. Rather, we have internalized such norms as valid and desirable and are committed to observing them. In a profound sense, we want to see ourselves (and to be seen) as loyal, cooperative, responsible, and respectful of others. In Canada and other societies around the world, people are socialized both to want to belong and to fear being viewed as different or deviant.

**Control theory** suggests that our connection to members of society leads us to conform systematically to society’s norms. This perspective asks why we do *not* behave in deviant ways. According to control theorists such as Travis Hirschi, we are bonded to our family members, friends, and peers in a way that leads us to follow the norms, mores, and folkways of our society, without conscious thought of whether we will be sanctioned if we fail to conform.

Hirschi (1969) noted that the more we feel a part of, or bonded with, society, the more effectively our behaviour is controlled, thereby preventing deviant actions. Bonds can be based on four components:

- *Attachments*—i.e., affection and respect for others who are conforming to society’s norms, who then become our role models
- *Commitments*—i.e., not wanting to risk our reputation or a good position in a company or good standing at a university
- *Involvements*—i.e., putting time into approved activities such as sports teams or volunteer work, thereby reducing the time to engage in potential deviant actions
- *Beliefs*—i.e., holding beliefs that certain behaviours are morally wrong.

Socialization develops our self-control so well that we don’t need further pressure to obey social norms. While control theory does not effectively explain the rationale for every conforming act, it nevertheless reminds us that while the media may focus on crime and disorder, most members of most societies conform to and obey basic norms (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990; Hirschi 1969).

## Crime

**Crime** is a violation of criminal law for which some governmental authority applies formal penalties. It represents a deviation from formal social norms administered by the state. And like deviance in general, what is considered a crime varies by time and place. For example, prohibition was a law in Canada in the early 1900s to stop the buying or drinking of alcohol; it was thought a particularly patriotic duty during the First World War. Today, one can buy alcohol at corner stores in some provinces and at government-run special beer and liquor stores in others. Laws divide crimes into various categories, depending on the severity of the offence, the age of the offender, the potential punishment that can be levied, and the court that holds jurisdiction over the case.

Crimes tend to affect some groups more than others; for example, their impact can be gender-specific and age-specific. In Canada, in all crimes against the person, women

and girls make up the vast majority of victims of sexual assault (82 percent), criminal harassment (78 percent), kidnapping or abduction (62 percent), and common assault (52 percent) (Status of Women Canada 2000).

## Types of Crime

Rather than relying solely on legal categories, sociologists classify crimes in terms of how they are committed and how society views the offences. In this section, we will examine four types of crime as differentiated by sociologists: professional crime, organized crime, white-collar crime, and “victimless crimes.”

### Professional Crime

Although the adage “crime doesn’t pay” is familiar, many people do make a career of illegal activities. A *professional criminal* is a person who pursues crime as a day-to-day occupation, developing skilled techniques and enjoying a certain degree of status among other criminals. Some professional criminals specialize in burglary, safecracking, hijacking of cargo, pickpocketing, and shoplifting. Such people have acquired skills that reduce the likelihood of arrest, conviction, and imprisonment. As a result, they may have long careers in their chosen “professions.”

Edwin Sutherland (1937) offered pioneering insights into the behaviour of professional criminals by publishing an annotated account written by a professional thief. Unlike the person who engages in crime only once or twice, professional thieves make a business of stealing. They devote their entire working time to planning and executing crimes and sometimes travel across the nation to pursue their “professional duties.” Like people in regular occupations, professional thieves consult with their colleagues concerning the demands of work, thus becoming part of a subculture of similarly occupied individuals. They exchange information on possible places to burglarize, on outlets for unloading stolen goods, and on ways of securing bail bonds if arrested.

### Organized Crime

A 1978 United States government report uses three pages to define the term *organized crime*. For our purposes, we will consider *organized crime* to be the work of a group that regulates relations between various criminal enterprises involved in the smuggling and sale of drugs, prostitution, gambling, and other illegal activities. Organized crime dominates the world of illegal business just as large corporations dominate the conventional business world. It allocates territory, sets prices for goods and services, and acts as an arbitrator in internal disputes.

Organized crime is a secret, conspiratorial activity that generally evades law enforcement. Organized crime

takes over legitimate businesses, gains influence over labour unions, corrupts public officials, intimidates witnesses in criminal trials, and even “taxes” merchants in exchange for “protection” (National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice 1976). An example of the intimidation tactics used by organized crime is the gunning down of Montreal crime reporter Michel Auger in 2000. Auger specialized in stories on organized crime and biker gangs in Quebec. Auger was shot five times, but recovered. Although it has not yet been proven conclusively that biker gangs were responsible for the execution-style attack, the attack came a day after his paper, *Le Journal*, printed one of his articles on biker-related murders.

There has always been a global element in organized crime. But recently law enforcement officials and policymakers have acknowledged the emergence of a new form of organized crime that takes advantage of advances in electronic communications. *Transnational* organized crime includes drug and arms smuggling, money laundering, and trafficking in illegal immigrants and stolen goods, such as automobiles (Office of Justice Programs 1999).

### White-Collar and Technology-Based Crime

Income tax evasion, stock manipulation, consumer fraud, bribery and extraction of “kickbacks,” embezzlement, and misrepresentation in advertising—these are all examples of *white-collar crime*, illegal acts committed in the course



“BUT IF WE GO BACK TO SCHOOL AND GET A GOOD EDUCATION, THINK OF ALL THE DOORS IT’LL OPEN TO WHITE-COLLAR CRIME.”

of business activities, often by affluent, “respectable” people. A good example of this occurred in the summer of 2002 when a seemingly endless list of large corporations was accused of insider trading, a form of corporate stock manipulation. Executives of companies such as Enron were accused of “cooking the books” to make it appear that the corporation was making greater profits than it was, ensuring that the price of stock would rise. The executives then made personal profits by selling their own shares before the public became aware that the earnings of Enron were much lower than expected. Stock shares dropped substantially with the earnings announcement, and many employees and members of the public who owned shares found themselves with paper shares that were not worth much, many losing their pension and retirement plans. Meanwhile, the corporate executives and accountants walked away with millions of dollars before the “crime” was discovered. The investigations are expected to take years to be completed, as is the case in most instances of large-scale white-collar or corporate crime. Edwin Sutherland (1949, 1983) likened these crimes to organized crime because they are often perpetrated through occupational roles (Friedrichs 1998).

A new type of white-collar crime has emerged in recent decades: computer crime. The use of such “high technology” allows one to carry out embezzlement or electronic fraud without leaving a trace, or to gain access to a company’s inventory without leaving home. An adept programmer can gain access to a firm’s computer by telephone and then copy valuable files. It is virtually impossible to track such people unless they are foolish enough to call from the same phone each time. According to a 2000 study by the FBI and the Computer Security Institute, 70 percent of companies in the United States relying on computer systems reported theft of electronic information for an estimated loss of U.S.\$265 million in 1999 alone (Zuckerman 2000).

Sutherland (1940) coined the term *white-collar crime* in 1939 to refer to acts by individuals, but the term has been broadened more recently to include offences by businesses and corporations as well. *Corporate crime*, or any act by a corporation that is punishable by the government, takes many forms and includes individuals, organizations, and institutions among its victims. Corporations may engage in anticompetitive behaviour, acts that lead to environmental pollution, tax fraud, stock fraud and manipulation, the production of unsafe goods, bribery and corruption, and worker health and safety violations (Simpson 1993).

Given the economic and social costs of white-collar crime, one might expect the criminal justice system to take this problem quite seriously. Yet research done in the United States shows that white-collar offenders are more likely to receive fines than prison sentences. In federal



New technology has produced both new types of crime and new ways to fight crime. In the aftermath of the riot at Woodstock '99, New York State Police posted photos of suspected lawbreakers on the Web, hoping to learn the identities of people like this concertgoer, photographed in the act of stealing a pay phone.

courts—where most white-collar cases end up—probation is granted to 40 percent of those who have violated antitrust laws, 61 percent of those convicted of fraud, and 70 percent of convicted embezzlers (Gest 1985). Amitai Etzioni’s study (1985, 1990) found that in 43 percent of the incidents, either no penalty was imposed or the company was required merely to cease engaging in the illegal practice and to return any funds gained through illegal means (for a different view, see Manson 1986).

Moreover, conviction for such illegal acts does not generally harm a person’s reputation and career aspirations nearly so much as conviction for street crime would. Apparently, the label “white-collar criminal” does not carry the stigma of the label “felon convicted of a violent crime.” Conflict theorists don’t find such differential labelling and treatment surprising. They argue that the criminal justice system largely disregards the white-collar

crimes of the affluent, while focusing on crimes often committed by the poor. If an offender holds a position of status and influence, his or her crime is treated as less serious, and the sanction is much more lenient (Maguire 1988).

### **Victimless Crimes**

White-collar or street crimes endanger people's economic or personal well-being against their will (or without their direct knowledge). By contrast, sociologists use the term *victimless crimes* to describe the willing exchange among adults of widely desired, but illegal, goods and services (Schur 1965, 1985).

While the term *victimless crime* is widely used, many people object to the notion that there is no victim other than the offender in such crimes. Excessive drinking, compulsive gambling, and illegal drug use contribute to an enormous amount of personal and property damage. And feminist sociologists contend that the so-called victimless crime of prostitution, as well as the more disturbing aspects of pornography, reinforce the misconception that women are "toys" who can be treated as objects rather than people (J. Flavin 1998; A. Jolin 1994).

Nonetheless, some activists are working to decriminalize many of these illegal practices. Supporters of decriminalization are troubled by the attempt to legislate a moral code of behaviour for adults. In their view, it is impossible to prevent prostitution, gambling, and other victimless crimes. The already overburdened criminal justice system should instead devote its resources to "street crimes" and other offences with obvious victims. However, opponents of decriminalization insist that such offences do indeed have victims, in the sense that they can bring harm to innocent people. For example, a person with a drinking problem can become abusive to a spouse or children; a compulsive gambler or drug user may steal to pursue his obsession. According to critics of decriminalization, society must not give tacit approval to conduct that has such harmful consequences (National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice 1976; Schur 1968, 1985).

The controversy over decriminalization reminds us of the important insights of labelling and conflict theories presented earlier. Underlying this debate are two interesting questions: Who has the power to define gambling, prostitution, and public drunkenness as "crimes"? And who has the power to label such behaviours as "victimless"? It is generally the government and, in some cases, the police and the courts.

Again, we can see that criminal law is not simply a universal standard of behaviour agreed on by all members of society. Rather, it reflects the struggle among

competing individuals and groups to gain governmental support for their particular moral and social values. For example, such organizations as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) have had success in recent years in modifying public attitudes toward drunkenness. Rather than being viewed as a victimless crime, drunkenness is increasingly being associated with the potential dangers of driving while under the influence of alcohol. As a result, the mass media are giving greater (and more critical) attention to people who are guilty of drunk driving, and many state and provincial governments have instituted more severe fines and jail terms for a wide variety of alcohol-related offences.

### **Crime Statistics**

Crime statistics are not as accurate as social scientists would like. However, since they deal with an issue of grave concern to people in many countries, they are frequently cited as if they were completely reliable. Such data do serve as an indicator of police activity, as well as an approximate indication of the level of certain crimes. Yet it would be a mistake to interpret these data as an exact representation of the incidence of crime.

In the Taking Sociology to Work box on page 192 of this chapter, a researcher at the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics talks about doing research on crime and criminal justice, and how useful her sociology background is in her work.

#### **Understanding Crime Statistics**

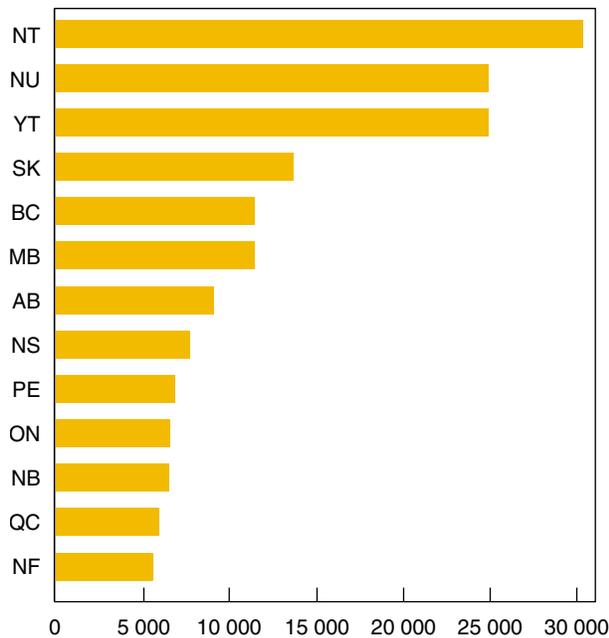
Public opinion polls reveal that Canadians believe the rate of crime to be increasing in this country, despite the release of 2001 statistics that indicate homicides remained stable, violent crimes saw a very small increase, and property crimes are continuing a downward trend begun in the early 1990s. In fact, the 2001 rate of property crimes was the lowest in nearly 30 years (Statistics Canada 2002). Violent crimes increased for the second year in 2001, after seven years of decline from 1993 to 1999. For the first time since 1993, the rate of sexual assault increased, although the 2001 rate was still 27 percent lower than that of 10 years earlier. The homicide rate has been decreasing since the mid-1970s (Statistics Canada 2002).

Within Canada, vast regional differences exist in rates of crime. As Figure 7-2 illustrates, in 2001, Saskatchewan's crime rates were the highest among the provinces, followed by those of British Columbia and Manitoba. Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec had the lowest rates of crime in the country.

Canada's crime rates are significantly lower than those of our American neighbours, particularly for violent

**FIGURE 7-2**

Crime By Province and Territory, 2001  
Rate per 100 000 population



Source: Statistics Canada 2002.

crimes such as homicide, for which the American rate is more than three times greater than that in Canada (Nelson and Fleras 1995). Research has shown, however, that Canadian and American rates converge in the area of spousal assault, showing that “Canadian men are just as, if not more, likely to beat their spouses as American men” (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998:vii).

Results from the Canadian National Survey on woman abuse on campus reveal that it is not only women in marital or cohabiting relationships who are in danger of abuse, but also those at post-secondary institutions who are in dating relationships (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998). A woman attending a post-secondary institution in Canada will acknowledge fearing “stranger danger,” despite the fact that she is more likely to be sexually assaulted by a man she not only knows, but who might actually

like her. And the assault is most likely to take place in a private location (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998). Table 7-4 illustrates the perception of safety of 1835 Canadian women students on campuses across the country.

Sociologists have several ways of measuring crime. Historically, they have relied on official statistics, but underreporting has always been a problem with such measures. Because members of racial and ethnic minority groups have not always trusted law enforcement agencies, they have often refrained from contacting the police. Feminist sociologists and others have noted that many women do not report sexual assault or spousal abuse out of fear that officials will regard the crime as their fault. Partly because of the deficiencies of official statistics, *victimization surveys* question ordinary people, not police officers, to learn how much crime occurs.

Unfortunately, like other crime data, victimization surveys have particular limitations. They require first that victims understand what has happened to them and also that victims disclose such information to interviewers. Fraud, income tax evasion, and blackmail are examples of crimes that are unlikely to be reported in victimization studies. Even though victimization surveys have their limitations, they can be helpful in augmenting police statistics. For example, both police statistics and victimization surveys report that, while the majority of offenders of violent crimes tend to be males, males and females are equally likely to be victims (Johnson 1996).

Table 7-4

**Reported Feelings of Safety on Campus and Surrounding Areas of 1835 Canadian Women Post-Secondary Students**

Activity	Percent reporting feeling unsafe	Percent reporting feeling very unsafe
Walking alone after dark	36.1	25.9
Riding a bus or streetcar alone after dark	35.7	12.9
Riding a subway alone after dark	34.8	38.7
Walking alone to a car in a parking lot after dark	42.5	25.7
Waiting for public transportation alone after dark	41.0	31.2
Walking past men they don't know while alone after dark	36.3	38.9

Source: DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998:3; Kelly and DeKeseredy 1994.



**HOLLY JOHNSON:**  
**Chief of Research,**  
**Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics**  
**Statistics Canada**

Holly Johnson uses her background in criminology to improve conditions for women and children who are victims of violence. Johnson works as a senior researcher at the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, created in 1981 as a partnership between the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to collect and report information on crime and the administration of justice in Canada.

The primary focus of her work at Statistics Canada, her teaching at Queen's University (where she is a part-time sociology faculty member), and her extensive writing and lecturing is domestic violence and other crimes of violence against women. Johnson is the author of *Dangerous Domains: Violence Against Women in Canada*, published in 1996 and based on the first national survey on the topic for which she was the principal investigator.

Johnson is currently head of a unit designed to bridge the gap between statistics and their application to policy development in the justice community. "Our mandate is to pursue analytical projects that will help to more fully explore criminal justice data," she says. It is part of a larger initiative by Statistics Canada to expand its capacity to analyze data and to



create links to researchers in the academic community. Her involvement extends to other countries such as Costa Rica, Paraguay, Australia, and the United States, and to international organizations through the auspices of the United Nations.

Initially, Johnson thought she would apply her background in criminology to a practitioner role. She did in fact spend a few years as a probation officer and then a correctional officer while completing her master's degree at the University of Ottawa. She quickly became fascinated with the research process and has maintained that focus throughout her 14-year career at Statistics Canada.

Since defending her Ph.D. thesis at the University of Manchester, Johnson has undertaken innovative research that combines justice and non-justice statistics, using surveys such as the General Social Survey on Victimization and the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth, as well as police statistics and statistical profiles of communities. "Our objective is to mine Statistics Canada data to enhance the policy process for criminal justice practitioners," says Johnson.

### **International Crime Rates**

If it is difficult to develop reliable crime data in Canada, it is even more difficult to make useful cross-national comparisons. Nevertheless, with some care, we can offer preliminary conclusions about how crime rates differ around the world.

During the 1980s and 1990s, violent crimes were much more common in the United States than in Canada and Western Europe. Murders, rapes, and robberies were reported to the police at much higher rates in the United States. Yet the incidence of certain other types of crime appears to be higher elsewhere. For example, England, Italy, Australia, and New Zealand all have higher rates of car theft than does the United States (Rotella 1999; Russell 1995).

Why are rates of violent crime so much higher in the United States? While there is no simple answer to this question, sociologist Elliot Currie (1985, 1998) has suggested that American society places greater emphasis on individual economic achievement than do other societies. At the same time, many observers have noted that the culture of the United States has long tolerated, if not condoned, many forms of violence. When coupled with

sharp disparities between poor and affluent citizens, significant unemployment, and substantial alcohol and drug abuse, all these factors combine to produce a climate conducive to crime.

Disturbing increases in violent crime are evident in other Western societies, however. For example, crime in Russia has skyrocketed since the overthrow of communist party rule (with its strict controls on guns and criminals) in 1991. Whereas there were fewer than 260 homicides in Moscow in 1978 and again in 1988, there are now more than 1000 homicides per year. Organized crime has filled a power vacuum in Moscow since the end of communism; one result is that gangland shootouts and premeditated "contract hits" have become more common. Some prominent reformist politicians have been targeted as well. Russia is the only nation in the world that incarcerates a higher proportion of its citizens than does the United States. Russia imprisons 580 per 100 000 of its adults on a typical day compared to 550 in the United States, 150 in Canada, fewer than 100 in Mexico or Britain, and only 16 in Greece (Currie 1998; Shinkai and Zvekc 1999).

**SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL CONTROL****Illicit Drug Use in Canada and Worldwide****The Issue**

Vancouver spends more money per capita in dealing with illicit drugs than any other city in Canada (Bula 2000). The mayor of Vancouver, Philip Owen, claims that although Vancouver's drug problem is so well-known, and has been highlighted in many media reports, this does not mean that other big cities are not struggling with the same concerns. Owen states: "Everyone has a drug problem, all the big-city mayors have talked about this. Every single one is looking for solutions. But nobody is prepared to stand up to the plate" (Bula 2000). In response to this problem, Vancouver authorities have devised a drug strategy and harm-reduction plan. According to the mayor, this is an "international crisis," and cities such as Yokohama, Japan, and Seattle, Washington, have asked for a copy of Vancouver's drug strategy (Bula 2000).

**The Setting**

National surveys have shown that in Canada, people living in British Columbia were most likely to report the personal use of illicit substances (Nelson and Fleras 1995). The drug "problem" is particularly apparent in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, an area that is the poorest in all of Canada, and that houses some of the most severe social, economic, and health problems in the country. The death rate in the area is high due to the growing incidence of hepatitis C and HIV, acquired through intravenous-injection drug use. Activities such as youth prostitution and panhandling become the means through which addicts can sustain their addiction.

**Sociological Insights**

Functionalists view alienation and anomie to be the cause of many forms of addiction, including alcohol and drug addiction (Nelson and Fleras 1995). The activities of addicts, according to functionalist theorists, have functional consequences for society. For example, they demonstrate the boundaries of so-called "rule-breaking behaviour" and they create social agreement and cohesion regarding unacceptable behaviours.

Conflict theorists, in contrast, ask the questions "Who benefits?" and "Why is it that some drug users receive the label 'addict,' while other users do not?"

Conflict thinkers argue that the state and its various agencies, such as prisons, police, and rehabilitation programs, serve to benefit from such labels because they create employment for correction officers, police officers, social workers, and counsellors. They also address the reasons why society does not label those addicted to prescription drugs and "legal" drugs such as tobacco, in the same manner as it labels and scapegoats those addicted to drugs such as cocaine and heroin.

Feminist approaches to addiction are as diverse as feminist theories themselves. Some argue that for women, addiction grows out of their overall status of subordination in society; that is, that women's powerlessness leads to various forms of self-destructive escapes such as drug use (Lundy 1991). Other feminist theories argue that the concept of gender and the various related roles and behaviours deny both men and women full expression of their own humanity; addiction becomes a metaphor for the gender stereotypes in our society (Nelson and Fleras 1995).

Interactionist approaches frame drug addiction in the context of continuous action on the part of the drug addict, and reaction on the part of those around her or him. They stress the process through which the person is identified as an "addict" and the impact that this label has on her or his sense of self. Goffman's dramaturgical approach is an example of this process of individual action and social reaction, in which the individual plays many roles, as would an actor. The drug addict, for example, may play one role in dealing with the police (for example, presenting himself or herself as someone trying to get "clean") while presenting a different image to peers.

**Policy Initiatives**

Vancouver's drug strategy and harm-reduction plan is the first of its kind in North America. It shifts the focus away from drug use as a criminal activity towards drug use as a health and safety issue; under the plan, users would receive treatment rather than jail terms and special treatment beds would be allocated to young users.

The drug strategy and harm-reduction plan, similar to those implemented in many European cities, is based on a four-pillar approach. The four pillars are:

1. *Enforcement.* This pillar includes a pilot drug-treatment court that would weigh various options of treatment, an increase in the police drug and organized-crime squads to target larger dealers, and the creation of a “drug action team” that would respond to neighbourhood drug issues.
2. *Harm reduction.* This notion encompasses the creation of an overdose-death prevention campaign, the provision of short-term shelter and housing for drug users on the street, and the establishment of street drug testing.
3. *Treatment.* The treatment element of the plan would provide: treatment beds for young people outside the downtown eastside; special treatment for women who are pregnant and/or have children; needle exchanges in primary health-care clinics,

hospitals and pharmacies; pilot day centres for addicts; and different kinds of housing for users and those trying to go clean.

4. *Prevention.* This pillar of the plan would give communities and neighbourhoods more power to combat drug abuse and to develop a pilot citywide school curriculum on drugs and drug abuse.

### Let's Discuss

1. Which do you think poses the greatest risk to society—illegal drugs (such as heroin and cocaine) or legal drugs (such as alcohol and tobacco)?
2. Why have certain drugs, and the individuals who use them, been treated so differently?
3. Should drug addiction be treated as a health issue or a criminal issue? Why or why not?

## Chapter Resources

### Summary

Conformity and deviance are two ways in which people respond to real or imagined pressures from others. In this chapter, we examine the relationship between deviance, conformity, and mechanisms of social control.

1. Deviant behaviour violates social norms. Some forms of deviance carry a negative social *stigma*, while other forms are more or less accepted.
2. From a functionalist point of view, *deviance* and its consequences help to define the limits of proper behaviour.
3. Interactionists maintain that we *learn* criminal behaviour from interactions with others (*cultural transmission*). They also stress that for crime to occur, there has to be a convergence of motivated offenders and suitable targets of crime (*routine activities theory*).
4. The theory of *differential association* holds that deviance results from exposure to attitudes favourable to criminal acts.
5. An important aspect of *labelling theory* is the recognition that some people are *viewed* as deviant while others engaged in the same behaviour are not.
6. The conflict perspective views laws and punishments as reflecting the interests of the powerful.
7. From a feminist perspective, the questions that sociologists ask about deviance and crime are incomplete because they fail to take into consideration the context of gender, race, sexuality, and class relations.
8. A society uses *social control* to bring about acceptance of basic norms.
9. Stanley Milgram defined *conformity* as going along with one's peers; *obedience* is defined as compliance with higher authorities in a hierarchical structure.
10. Some norms are so important to a society that they are formalized into *laws*. Socialization is a primary source of conforming and obedient behaviour, including obedience to law.
11. *Crime* represents a deviation from formal social norms administered by the state.
12. Sociologists differentiate among professional crime, organized crime, white-collar crime, and victimless crimes (such as drug use and prostitution).
13. Crime statistics are among the least reliable social data, partly because so many crimes are not reported to law enforcement agencies.
14. Harm-reduction plans shift the focus away from drug use as a criminal activity towards drug use as a health and safety issue.

## Critical Thinking Questions

1. What mechanisms of formal and informal social control are evident in your university classes and in day-to-day life and social interactions at your school?
2. What approach to deviance do you find most persuasive: that of functionalists, conflict theorists, interactionists, labelling theorists, or feminist theorists? Why is this approach more convincing than the others? What are the main weaknesses of each approach?
3. Rates of violent crime in the United States are higher than in Canada, Western Europe, Australia, or New Zealand. Draw on as many of the theories discussed in the chapter as possible to explain why the United States is such a comparably violent society.

## Key Terms

- Anomie theory of deviance** Robert Merton's theory that explains deviance as an adaptation either of socially prescribed goals or of the norms governing their attainment, or both. (176)
- Conformity** Going along with one's peers, individuals of a person's own status who have no special right to direct that person's behaviour. (182)
- Control theory** A view of conformity and deviance that suggests that our connection to members of society leads us to conform systematically to society's norms. (187)
- Crime** A violation of criminal law for which some governmental authority applies formal penalties. (187)
- Cultural transmission** A school of criminology that argues that criminal behaviour is learned through social interactions. (178)
- Deviance** Behaviour that violates the standards of conduct or expectations of a group or society. (171)
- Deviantize** The power to define what is acceptable and what is deviant. (172)
- Differential association** A theory of deviance proposed by Edwin Sutherland that holds that violation of rules results from exposure to attitudes favourable to criminal acts. (178)
- Formal social control** Social control carried out by authorized agents, such as police officers, judges, school administrators, and employers. (185)
- Informal social control** Social control carried out casually by ordinary people through such means as laughter, smiles, and ridicule. (185)
- Labelling theory** An approach to deviance that attempts to explain why certain people are viewed as deviants while others engaging in the same behaviour are not. (179)
- Obedience** Compliance with higher authorities in a hierarchical structure. (182)
- Organized crime** The work of a group that regulates relations between various criminal enterprises involved in the smuggling and sale of drugs, prostitution, gambling, and other illegal activities. (188)
- Patriarchy** A social system in which males dominate females and in which masculinity is more highly valued than femininity. (182)
- Professional criminal** A person who pursues crime as a day-to-day occupation, developing skilled techniques and enjoying a certain degree of status among other criminals. (188)
- Routine activities theory** The notion that criminal victimization increases when there is a convergence of motivated offenders and suitable targets. (178)
- Social constructionist perspective** An approach to deviance that emphasizes the role of culture in the creation of the deviant identity. (180)
- Social control** The techniques and strategies for preventing deviant human behaviour in any society. (182)
- Societal-reaction approach** Another name for *labelling theory*. (179)
- Stigma** A label used to devalue members of deviant social groups. (173)
- Victimization surveys** Questionnaires or interviews used to determine whether people have been victims of crime. (191)
- Victimless crimes** A term used by sociologists to describe the willing exchange among adults of widely desired, but illegal, goods and services. (190)
- White-collar crime** Crimes committed by affluent individuals or corporations in the course of their daily business activities. (188)

## Additional Readings

Boritch, Helen. 1997. *Fallen Woman: Female Crime and Criminal Justice in Canada*. Toronto: ITP Nelson. A comprehensive account and interpretation of rates of female crime in Canada, and the treatment of female crime in the criminal justice system.

DeKeseredy, Walter S., and Martin D. Schwartz. 1998. *Women Abuse on Campus: Results from the Canadian National Survey*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. This volume provides the results of a national survey on the abuse of women on Canadian post-secondary campuses. The authors expose a “hidden campus curriculum” that contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequality.

Finkenauer, James O., and Patricia W. Gavin. 1999. *Scared Straight: The Panacea Phenomenon Revisited*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press. A critical look at programs in which prisoners speak to juveniles in

an effort to scare them away from crime. Drawing on data from both the United States and Norway, the authors find that such programs have had little success, but remain immensely popular with the general public.

Gamson, Joshua. 1998. *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. A sociologist looks at the presentation of socially dysfunctional or stigmatized behaviours on television talk shows.

### JOURNALS

Among the journals that focus on issues of deviance, social control, and crime are *Crime and Delinquency* (founded in 1955), *Criminology* (1961), *Deviant Behaviour* (1979), and *Law and Society Review* (1966).



### Internet Connection

[www.mcgrawhill.ca/college/schaefer](http://www.mcgrawhill.ca/college/schaefer)

For additional Internet exercises relating to the sociological study of deviance, visit the Schaefer Online Learning Centre at <http://www.mcgrawhill.ca/college/schaefer>. Please note that while the URLs listed were current at the time of printing, these sites often change—check the Online Learning Centre for updates.

This chapter introduces us to many different types of crimes and theories, all geared toward bringing about a greater understanding of deviant behaviour. Take a virtual field trip to Dark Horse Multimedia, Inc.’s The Crime Library™ (<http://www.crimelibrary.com>). Choose one criminal listed on the site and read the online biography and view any pictures provided.

(a) Which person did you choose? Why did you choose that person?

- (b) What crimes did the person allegedly commit? Can this person’s deviant behaviour serve as an example of any of the “Types of Crimes” found in your text? If so, how?
- (c) What social and historical forces played a part in the person’s behaviour or decisions?
- (d) What fact that you learned about this person surprised you the most? Why?
- (e) Which of the theories presented in the textbook do you think would be most useful for gaining an understanding of the person’s behaviour? Why that theory?
- (f) According to Merton’s theory presented in your textbook, of which “Mode(s) of Individual Adaptation” would the criminal you read about be considered an example? Why?
- (g) What informal and formal social controls were used with this person?

