
Chapter 6

Learning Objectives

- LO 6.1: Define deviance.
- LO 6.2: Use sociological theories to explain the causes of crime and deviance.
- LO 6.3: Demonstrate understanding of processes involved in creating norms.
- LO 6.4: Explain how social location influences what and who is defined as deviant.
- LO 6.5: Identify and apply techniques of neutralization and stigma management strategies.

Print Activities, Assignable through LMS

Doing Sociology 6.1 Deviance in the Ashley Madison Hack

LO 6.1: Define deviance.

Time: 15-30 minutes

Type: in class or out of class



In this exercise, you will consider the layers of potentially deviant behavior involved in identifying users of a website intended to facilitate extramarital affairs.

AshleyMadison.com was a dating website, but unlike other dating sites, this one was for married people seeking to have extramarital affairs. In July of 2015, a group of hackers calling themselves “The Impact Team” stole the Ashley Madison user data and later released users’ personally identifying information, including email addresses. Outcomes of the data breach included public shaming of users, extortion attempts, potentially serious legal consequences (for instance, 1,200 users had email addresses from Saudi Arabia, where infidelity can result in capital punishment), and even several suicides of publicly humiliated users.

The AshleyMadison.com data breach entailed multiple forms of so-called deviance: the theft and public release of the information by “The Impact Team,” the marital infidelity (intended or actual) of the site’s users, and the suicides that resulted.

Consider the following questions:

1. Which of these three do you consider the most deviant, and why?
2. Do you reject the label of “deviant,” for any of these behaviors? Why or why not?
3. Considering both legal punishments and personal repercussions, who was likely punished most severely—the website operators, the website users, or the hackers? How would you match the severity of the punishment with the severity of the deviance? Explain.

Instructor’s Note

This would make a good fishbowl activity, in which a small group of students (along with one empty chair) sit in a circle at the center of the room to discuss a topic. The rest of the class encircles the small

group, listening. At any time, a listener can move into the empty chair and join the small group to discuss the topic, but another member must leave, always keeping one chair empty. Small-group members are instructed to keep the conversation going, rather than just go around stating each individual's position one by one.

After the fishbowl activity, have all students form small groups to discuss their reactions to the conversation, such as: What surprised them, and why? What did they (dis)agree with, and why? What do they wish the discussants had addressed? What questions do they think a sociologist might ask about this topic? This article from the Guardian might provide some interesting quotes:

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/28/what-happened-after-ashley-madison-was-hacked>.

Doing Sociology 6.2 Applying Statistical, Legalistic, and Normative Approaches

LO 6.1: Define deviance.

Time: 15-30 minutes

Type: in class or out of class



In this exercise, you will compare and contrast statistical, legalistic, and normative approaches to understanding deviance.

In groups of three or four, think about and write down some behaviors, conditions, and beliefs that fit the following criteria:

- Deviant using a statistical approach but not a legalistic approach
- Deviant using a normative approach but not a statistical approach
- Deviant using all of the approaches

Now take a few minutes to write down your own responses to the following questions:

1. Which of the approaches best captures your own understanding of what constitutes deviance? Why do you think that approach is best?
2. Which of the deviant acts involved in the Ashley Madison hack (see Doing Sociology 6.1) meet the criteria for the statistical, legalistic, and normative approaches?

Instructor's Note

When individuals are done writing, have them join the small group again to discuss their responses, to be followed by a full-class discussion.

Doing Sociology 6.3 What's Wrong with Fat?

LO 6.2: Use sociological theories to explain the causes of crime and deviance.

LO 6.3: Demonstrate understanding of processes involved in creating norms.

Time: More than 1 hour

Type: out of class

