Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Define sex from a biological perspective and describe its relevance.
2. Discriminate between the changes in sexual attitudes that has occurred as a result of the sexual revolution and counter-revolution.
3. Summarize the information surrounding the issues and controversies regarding sex, including teen pregnancy, pornography, prostitution, and sexual violence.
4. Examine the three theories regarding sexuality in society and describe their relevance.
5. Describe deviance and the different factors that influence it.
6. Examine the three theoretical foundations of deviance and describe one theory within each foundation.
7. Describe the U.S. Criminal Justice System and its effectiveness in stemming crime and deviance in the United States.

Written Lecture

Sexuality and Society

Sometimes it is hard for people to understand exactly how the terms gender and sex differ. Sex refers to physical characteristics of the body. Gender concerns the psychological, social, and cultural differences between the sexes (or males and females).

When a child is born, it has no knowledge of sex or gender. By some social standards, it is an empty slate ready to be shaped. However, studies of parent-infant interactions reveal that boys and girls are treated differently right from birth. In planning for the baby’s arrival, parents purchase everything blue for the boys and everything pink for the girls. They purchase “boy toys” and “girl toys.” Girl babies are thought to be “cute, sweet, and cuddly” and receive more gentle treatment from their parents. However, boys are perceived to be less fragile and are treated as such. Through contact with family, media, school, etc., they gradually internalize the social norms and expectations that are seen to correspond with their sex.

Sex is not always clear cut. Occasionally, someone is born with both female and male sex organs or incomplete sex organs. However, our culture demands that sex be clear cut. This is evident by the fact that parents are required to record the sex of a child at birth. Also, almost every form we complete asks for our sex.

In recent years, public opinion regarding sexual orientation has shown a remarkable change, but it still remains a very controversial subject. There are those who feel that sexual orientation is a product of biology. However, there are others who are firm in their belief that sexual orientation is a result of one’s...
upbringing or environment. In the United States and around the world, heterosexuality is the norm because it permits human reproduction, but most societies also tolerate homosexuality.

Attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexual relations continue to be one of the more complex areas of public opinion that the Gallup Poll measures. The issue has been at the center of state and federal legislative battles. Gallup’s recent “Values and Beliefs” survey shows that a majority of Americans accept the idea that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal and that homosexuality is an acceptable way of life. The recent survey also finds that almost nine out of 10 Americans agree that homosexuals should have equal rights in terms of job opportunities, although opinions on allowing homosexual couples to legally form civil unions, giving them some of the legal rights of married couples, are evenly divided.

Inequality is another topic that should be addressed when talking about sexuality and society. Researchers have found that most societies throughout history have differentiated between male and female societal roles, and within the past century, women have made considerable progress in terms of inequality, especially in the Labor Force (Reskin & Padavic, 2002). Laws have been passed to prohibit sexual discrimination in the workplace and in schools.

Deviance

What determines whether a person’s actions end up being seen as eccentric, creative, or deviant? All behavior, deviance as well as conformity, is shaped by society. We define people who cheat on tests, drive too fast, or cut class as deviant.

Emile Durkheim observed that deviant behavior is an integral part of all healthy societies (1895, 1958). He suggested that in the presence of deviant behavior, a social group becomes united in its response. He felt that deviance performs four essential functions:

1. *Deviance affirms cultural values and norms:* Basically, without evil, there can be no good. The entire reason we, as a society, must make rules regarding conduct is that deviant behavior occurs. Deviant acts help "define and support morality."

2. *Responding to deviance clarifies moral boundaries:* By labeling certain people as deviant, society draws boundaries between right and wrong. By witnessing the actions of others and their negative consequences, we learn not to repeat such acts or that such acts are wrong.

3. *Responding to deviance brings people together:* When people act in deviant ways, those who are against the acts tend to join together, feeling closer to each other due to their shared stake in morality and disgust in the act.

4. *Deviance encourages social change:* The acts of deviant people challenge the boundaries of society and can eventually spread into the masses, changing those boundaries. So, as Durkheim said, "today's deviance can become tomorrow's morality" (Macionis, 2011, p. 175).

Sociologist Robert K. Merton practiced a functional approach to deviant behavior within society. He believed that social institutions act to further society and
ultimately keep stability within the social structure. He proposed a typology of deviance based upon two criteria: (1) a person's motivations or adherence to cultural goals and (2) a person's belief in how to attain the goals. These two criteria are shown in the diagram below. According to Merton, there are five types of deviance based upon these criteria:

(Macionis, 2011, p. 176)

- **Conformity** involves the acceptance of the cultural goals and means of attaining these goals (e.g., a doctor).
- **Innovation** involves the acceptance of the goals of a culture, but the rejection of the traditional and/or legitimate means of attaining those goals (e.g., a drug dealer values wealth but employs alternative means of attaining the wealth).
- **Ritualism** involves the rejection of cultural goals, but the routine acceptance of the means for achieving the goals (e.g., a disillusioned employee who goes to work each day and goes through the routine of the tasks of the job).
- **Retreatism** involves the rejection of both the cultural goals and the traditional means of achieving those goals (e.g., a homeless person who is homeless more by choice than by force or circumstance).
- **Rebellion** is a special case wherein the individual rejects both the cultural goals and traditional means of achieving them, but actively attempts to replace both elements of the society with different goals and means (e.g., the hippies).

Crime is one of the major acts of deviance in the United States. However, although many people agree, they are divided over what can be done about it. One of the greatest challenges is juvenile offenders.

People who have lost relatives and friends as a result of criminal activity often see the death penalty as justified. However, capital punishment raises many doubts for those who fear that innocent individuals may be executed for crimes they did not commit.
References


Learning Activities (Non-Graded)

1. With your favorite search engine, access the Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center, and search for the article “A Legal History of Same-Sex Marriage Battles in the United States” by NOLO. Consider the various legal battles regarding same-sex marriage. Do you think this is topic will ever be fully resolved?

   Full article citation:


   **Disclaimer:** The article was originally written in 2003, so the information is outdated, but interesting nonetheless.

2. With your favorite search engine, access the Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center, and search for the article “The Growth of Hate Crimes Legislation” by Gerstenfeld. Consider the topic of hate crimes in relation to juvenile delinquency. How do you think hate crimes will be resolved? What can be done to limit them?

   Full article citation: