CHAPTER 8

DEVIATING FROM THE NORM: GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

Introduction

Deviance, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. While this statement may sound somewhat strange, it is actually very true. Like beauty, deviance is socially and culturally defined. It is a response to a norm, that is, a socially accepted pattern of behavior. However, since social behavior is not placed in concrete, individuals and groups will interpret norms in any number of ways. Thus what is considered as socially acceptable by one group may as easily be viewed as deviant behavior by others. Look, for example, at the relatively brief 50 year history of rock and roll music. When rock and roll music gained public attention in the early 1950's, it was met with outcries from numerous groups in society that viewed the music as “anti-Christian” and “anti-Patriotic.” In their minds, this music was going to destroy family values and the American way of life. Not only did rock and roll question the socially accepted norms for music, dance and public propriety, it also called into question long held attitudes and norms on racism and sexual activity.

One would have thought that the years following the beginning of rock and roll would have turned this ‘deviant’ behavior into socially accepted behavior. However, each subsequent generation of “rockers” since the 1950's has had to deal with the label of deviant. The irony of this is that the group once considered to be the deviants, became the normative group which labeled the next group as deviants. The ‘Elvis Presley’ generation looked askew at the “Beatles” generation who in turn had problems with “ Acid Rock ”, “Alternative Rock” and so on. Thus each step in the evolution of this musical form was beset by a label of deviance with this
deviance usually being defined by a group, who themselves, were labeled deviant by their predecessor.

It is important to remember that behavior which deviates from the norm can be dysfunctional to the group, but at the same time can be an agent for change. Breaking rules may be a sign that some individuals and groups do not share the same normative definitions or they have decided to replace the socially approved means to an end with their own perspectives and behaviors. Thus bank robbers may accept the societal definition of having a lot of money. However, the socially approved norms of hard work, saving and investment may be replaced with the “quick fix” of obtaining this wealth through non-acceptable means.

On the other hand, if large groups of society do not adhere to the norm, it may signal that changes in attitudes and behaviors have occurred and that the existing norms may need to be redefined or changed altogether. For example, in the 1960's, many states passed laws stating that individuals could not wear clothes made from an American flag or replicas of it. This was done in response to the various student, racial and women’s groups that were questioning the existing social order in the United States. The group in power felt that wearing the flag was defacing it and what it stood for and thus passed laws (socially accepted norms) to eliminate this unpatriotic behavior. Today, however, it is quite common to see many groups, ranging from the conservative religious groups to athletes to rock and rollers wearing attire that replicates the American Flag. In most of these cases, this is done as a sign of identification and patriotism. It is very possible that many of the original laws have not been changed, so that people wearing American flag regalia today out of identification and patriotism may actually be committing a deviant and criminal act. The irony of this is that the deviant behavior today actually supports the intent of the original law.
As applied sociologists we are less concerned with the “badness” of the deviance. We are more concerned with the conditions and the definitions that cause the deviance to exist. We also want to know how various individuals and groups respond to the non-normative behavior. Most importantly we want to be able to understand the impact of the behavior on the group, culture and society.

What is Normative Behavior?

As we have mentioned in earlier chapters, social behavior is, for the most part, structured, patterned and expected. It is structured in order to place some boundaries or parameters around individual behavior. This process is known as social control. The intent is to develop some ‘order’ to the group or society. For example, all of us are familiar with a red, octagonal sign that we see at intersections. Even if it didn’t have any writing on it, we know that this means that we are to bring our vehicle to a ‘stop’ before continuing through the intersection. The intent of this sign (and therefore norm) is to maintain social order. What would happen if there were no stop signs? The number of accidents, injuries and even deaths would go up dramatically. Think how much your car insurance would cost?

Social behavior is patterned. Certain jobs or positions in society function because there are behaviors associated with them. These social roles and statuses are dependent upon the player and the rest of the participants sharing the same definitions of the behaviors. These socially agreed upon attitudes and behaviors become ways of thinking or acting as defined by the group. Norms can run the gamut from the way one dresses (folkways) to the way groups morally view the behavior (e.g., Ten Commandments), to behavior with legal sanctions and punishment. As with most social behavior, norms are complex and cross a number of levels. Wearing a bikini swimsuit to your wedding would probably be considered to be in bad taste (folkway), but there
are most likely no laws that prohibit you from doing so. Now let’s say that you do wear the
swimsuit into the church. The minister and other individuals come up to you and tell you that
your behavior is immoral and that you are committing a mortal sin. You have now broken both a
folkway and a more (moral sanction.) Finally, the police are called and you are arrested for
indecent exposure and creating a public disturbance. Now you have gone and broken the law!

Finally, socially conforming behavior is expected. Since the norms are the shared
definitions of behaviors, we come to expect individuals and groups to play out those behaviors in
mutually shared ways. Not only does this maintain order, it allows us to develop a comfort zone
where we are able to expect and anticipate the behavior that is to occur. By expecting the
normative behavior we are able to develop responses to it in an orderly, shared manner. Think
of a classroom and the expected behavior for the role of teacher and student. When you walk
into the classroom, there are certain normative expectations that you have about the teacher even
before you have met the individual. You expect the person, in the teacher role, to impart
information, maintain order in the classroom, and evaluate your performance fairly. After many
years of attending school, you are so adept at this process, that you can assess the teacher in a
matter of a few minutes and develop your expectations for the course. By the way the teacher is
dressed, presents to the class (reads material verbatim vs. discussing material) and handles
questions, you can pretty quickly define your expectations of what the class will be like.

On the other hand, the normative behavior of the classroom has expectations of how you
will play out your role as student. Most classrooms have the chairs and tables neatly organized.
Once you enter the room, you are expected to sit in one of these chairs and, in many cases, you
may even be assigned to it. Once a bell rings or the teacher begins to talk, you are expected to
be quiet and attentive to the lecture. If you have a question or comment, you are expected to
raise your hand and wait patiently to be recognized. Otherwise, you are expected to listen to what the teacher is saying and take notes as appropriate.

**Defining Deviance**

At its most basic definition, deviance is the act of not following the norms of the group or society. Sounds pretty simple, but as a sociologist you have come to expect that most social behavior is not that simple. So let’s look at the concept of deviance in a little more detail. Like socially approved behavior, deviant behavior has to be defined as such by the group or society. This can run the gamut from the statement “we don’t do things that way” to codified laws which define what deviance is and how we can expect to be punished for it. Obviously, the level of the sanctioning and punishment will be related to the severity that the group places on the deviant act. The deviant act of whispering in class may be sanctioned by only a word or glance from the teacher, while the deviant act of murder may be punished by the execution of the offender.

It is important to remember that definitions of deviance are not always understood, shared, or followed by all the members of a group or society. In many cases, the definitions will differ from group to group, community to community and state to state. Look, for example, at the ‘legal’ ages for driving, smoking and drinking. While they may differ from state to state, most states have enacted laws which dictate the socially appropriate age at which one is allowed to legally drive a car, smoke a cigarette or drink alcohol. This is not to say that individuals are physically incapable of performing these acts before they reach that age. It does say, however, that one can be punished for breaking these norms by being under the socially approved age. This is done to maintain social order and control and, while research is used at times to decide the most appropriate age, many times one age is arbitrarily selected over another. A twenty one year old taking an alcoholic drink will not differ that much from a twenty year old having the
same type of alcoholic drink. However, the norms dictate that the twenty one year old can legally drink the alcohol, while the twenty year old is actually performing deviant behavior.

In many cases, the behavior may not be considered deviant by the group. In the 1960's, many college students felt that smoking marijuana was socially acceptable behavior even though it was considered a felony in most states, punishable in some cases with up to 50 years in prison. Today, we read and hear a great deal about the use and existence of state militias. These groups, while sharing the overall normative aspects of the United States Constitution and patriotism, have actually decided that many of the existing laws are contrary to their definitions and interpretation of the “American Way of Life.” Therefore, they feel that they have the right to disregard the socially accepted norms and replace them with their own interpretation. This difference of “opinion” becomes very serious when the deviance moves from a singular act of disregarding the norm to any act where the norm is intentionally broken. In this case the act of “civil disobedience” may actually cause large-scale damage, injury and death to other people.

Another key factor in defining deviance is when the group is faced with conflicting norms. Which ones should they follow? Historically, the country of Ireland has been governed by both secular and religious laws. In most cases, these laws were one and the same so most people had little problem adhering to both sets of laws. However, deep societal changes have been taking place in Ireland over the past ten years which have resulted in a conflict between religious beliefs and civil laws. A current debate centers on the issue of shops opening for business on Sundays. For the most part, shops close at 5:30 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. most days and might stay open late until 8:00 p.m. one night of the week. Historically, no shops, with the exception of a limited opening time for newspapers and gasoline businesses, were open on Sunday. This is in conformance with the edicts of the Catholic Church laws. A number of
internationally owned businesses have established retail outlets in Ireland and using the argument that it would make life more convenient for working individuals, a retail/grocery chain announced plans to open on Sundays and to pay the workers triple time pay rates. This was unheard of. The company offered triple time to encourage the workers to come to work. However, looking back on the strategies used by this company, the services of a sociologist might have been useful in explaining social behavior. The Irish Roman Catholic Church (the predominant religious body in the Republic of Ireland) came out fighting to protect the sanctity of the Sunday day of Rest. Although staying open on Sunday was not a violation of Irish civil law, it was a definite violation of the religious law. This was a deviant act. The announcement was followed by a national rebuke and warnings about the spiritual dangers of going to the shops on Sunday by the highest Irish official Catholic representative. Local Sunday church services were marked by sermons which preached the need to abide by church laws and the punishments that would follow if the religious norms were violated. The intent to open stores on Sundays started in 1996 and is still under debate in Ireland. A few stores have opened and are quietly doing business.

Here we have a case where individuals and groups have to decide which group’s norms they will keep. They may agree with the secular norm and actually find it more convenient to go to the stores on Sunday, but they may be fearful of the punishment they will receive from the church for doing so. While this discrepancy may not sound too traumatic to most Americans who are used to doing both on Sundays, it is a serious concern to many Irish citizens who want to be able to shop on Sundays, but do not want to deviate from the norms of church.

Whether or not you think about it, we are constantly in a number of situations similar to the one described above. Our behavior may be defined by a number of norms and these norms
may be in conflict with each other. This may run the gamut from “telling a little white lie” to get yourself or a friend out of a troubling situation to deciding the most appropriate behavior in situations (such as having an abortion) that have major legal, moral and religious implications at the micro, meso and macro levels of social order.

As applied sociologists, we need to take all of these factors into consideration when we are analyzing deviant behavior. How and why is the behavior being defined as deviant? Who is defining it as deviant? Is the group or individual performing the behavior accepting as deviant? And, if a number of norms are in conflict with each other, why was one norm chosen over the others? Once again you will want to place the deviant behavior in a social context and assess the environmental factors affecting it?

**The Consequences of Deviance: Bad News/Good News**

Deviant behavior can be considered “bad” news or “good” news for a group or society. In most cases, we tend to view the deviance as being negative and, in many cases, harmful. But, as sociologists, we also need to be aware of the positive affects of some deviant acts. A classic example of this comes from Durkheim’s study of suicide. While he talks about ‘egoistic suicide’ as being centered around the individual’s inability to cope with his or her social environment (negative); he also talks about ‘altruistic suicide’, where the individual dies in order to protect the safety and lives of others in the group or society (positive). Even his description of ‘anomic suicide’ could be viewed as positive, in that the suicidal response to the normless situation, will, in and of itself, create norms for dealing with the situation in the future. All three of these types of behavior are deviant behavior. However, as a society we have defined some types as being more positive or socially acceptable than the others.

Probably one of the major negative connotations of deviant behavior is its subsequent
disruption of the social order. When groups of individuals are used to doing things in certain ways, deviating from these norms can be disconcerting, confusing and painful. Not only are the normal day to day activities disrupted, the group has to change its behavior to respond to the deviant act. We have very strong norms about breaking into one’s home and stealing another’s possessions. These norms are meant to maintain the social order and to provide a sense of security. Thus, the resident can maintain a level of comfort that, under normal circumstances, his or her house is safe and secure. While they are aware that something could happen, they are not overly concerned and go about their normal daily activities.

Now let’s say that the house is burglarized. Normal behavior and activity is disrupted. Not only are prized possessions missing, the victim now feels a loss of the sense of security and a sense of being violated. No longer will they be able to feel totally secure and they may change their behavior dramatically to ensure their safety in the future. This may mean being more careful, putting in a security system, or even purchasing a weapon. At the same time, the victims will have to change their normal activities in order to help focus on solving the crime. They will have to interact with one or a number of police officers, create an inventory of the articles stolen, and deal with their insurance company. Also they may be asked to go to the police station to identify recovered property and they may have to appear in court as part of the case against the alleged offender. Thus, the one deviant act may disrupt normative activities both in the present as they respond to the act and in the future as they change lifestyles to protect themselves from the act happening again.

Related to the disruption is the fear of victimization. Recent governmental findings have shown that the actual amount of violent crime has declined over the past couple of years. Whether society is becoming less deviant or less deviance is being reported is a subject for
another debate. However, it does not appear that individuals have equated the lower incidence of crime with their fear of being victimized. If anything, the feelings that I or someone I know will be eventually be victimized have increased dramatically over the years. Thus even the threat of deviance has caused a change in behavior. Individuals fearful of being victimized will change their normal activities in order to minimize their chances of being the recipient of a deviant act. This may mean buying devices (i.e., home and car security systems) to warn them of impending deviant acts; or physically changing behavior such as not going out alone after dark in the evening. In either case, just the threat of deviance has changed behavior and lifestyles and disrupted the existing normative behavior.

A third consequence of the deviant behavior is the labeling process that usually accompanies it. Once a deviant act occurs and an individual or group is associated with it, it is quite common for members of society to label the alleged offenders as deviant, whether they are guilty or not. For example, look at the O.J. Simpson case. Whether you personally agree or disagree about his innocence, it is safe to say that most of American society has labeled him guilty of murder. Once the label is attached, the way that person acts and how others act with him/her change dramatically. Since most people have labeled Simpson as a murderer, even though the legal system found him innocent, his lifestyle and livelihood has changed dramatically. Not only has he lost any acting, commentating or endorsement opportunities, he has been refused entrance into public areas such as restaurants and golf clubs.

Once the deviant label is attached, it is pretty hard for it to be removed. Let’s say that in the next couple of years we find out that others were responsible for the murder that Simpson was accused of and that he was actually innocent of the crime. How likely will it be for people in American society to remove the deviant label and accept him the way they did before the
crime? Also, how likely will it be that his children will be able to shed the label that they are the
son and daughter of a murderer? Because of the immense amount of coverage of this trial, it is
highly unlikely that things can ever return to “normal” for those involved in the Simpson case.

Finally, one of the positive consequences of deviance is that it may actually be a
precursor for change. The act of deviance may be a response to norms that are out of date,
practices no longer followed or not socially accepted. Remember, this does not mean that the
actual deviant act is acceptable for it is still violating an existing social norm. After all, Robin
Hood was still a thief when he robbed the rich to give to the poor, no matter how commendable
this act may have been. The deviant behavior may suggest that there are problems or inequities
in the existing system that need to be changed. Keep in mind that the changes brought about by
the deviant act may not be viewed as normative behavior by all individuals or groups and, the
change, in and of itself, may cause additional deviance to occur.

Research Tools

There is a wide array of research tools to choose from. However, your criteria for
selecting a research tool should be based on your research design and your study objectives.
You will find data for your study in many different places which would strongly support our
recommendation for the use of multiple data collection methods to gather a more accurate and
detailed view of your study topic.

In terms of ease, secondary data collection is your first choice. Using this research
skill you will most likely gather data from newspaper stories and TV news and video archives.
However, a tremendous source of unreported news can be found on many different national and
international addresses on the Internet. Internet sites are appearing daily and government
agencies are beginning to make access to some data available through the site. Examples of
deviance do not sit on the park bench waiting to be discovered, and you will most likely gather more data than you need for your analysis. As you include secondary data sources in your analysis, we strongly urge you to check and recheck the accuracy of the data you have gathered.

For this reason, collecting data from a number of different publications, verifying the accuracy of the story lines between the publications and looking for changes in the report over time is our recommended data collection strategy when using secondary data collection techniques. You are probably not the first person to study this topic and the university/college libraries and local libraries carry a wide variety of information on your topic of interest. The beauty of the Internet technology is the ability to track down and order the work of authors and publications of interest in a fraction of the time it would have taken five years ago.

If you thinking of conducting a detailed study in the area of Deviance, you will need to consider some kind of research tool using observation. Field studies, that is data gathered as the social behavior is taking place with the investigator present in some capacity at the event, may be the most suitable research strategy to follow. However, participant observation is an advanced data collection tool and should be learned under the supervision of a sociologist experienced in this methodology. Briefly, there are four possible ways of gathering data using this strategy.

First, you might select two groups for your study focus. One group would be more likely than the other to display the activities that you have identified in your research design. You do not play any role in these activities. You inform the groups that you are studying their behavior and you observe and take notes. Second, you decide to become a member of each group and participate in the activity. You inform each group that you are an investigator and that you are participating in their activities. You might find that it is harder to keep track of
recording the data using this technique but you will gain other valuable information from participating. Third, you select two groups for your study. You do not tell them what you are doing and you observe and take notes. Fourth, you select two groups for study. You become a member of each group. You do not inform anyone of your reason for being in the group. You gather data from your experiences in each of the groups.

We generally refer to the activities of the first two groups as being conducted in an overt manner. The latter two data collection skills use a covert data collection technique. The covert approach is most likely used when the investigator has a deep interest in identifying the social structure, social process and norms of a secret group or society. However, there are a number of legal issues, such as violating personal rights, entrapment and personal privacy and business privacy laws. There are plenty of examples of the misuse of covert data collection techniques where ambitious television producers or investigative reporters took concealed cameras into areas closed to the public to expose seemingly illegal, or at the very least embarrassing, activities. Many of these stories have resulted in million dollar lawsuits which have been settled outside court following the payment of damages. Please remember that your pursuit of accurate data does not include the right to break laws or abuse peoples’ rights. So how do you do a study like this? Look for someone who is a ‘gatekeeper’ or may have access to the information you are looking for. Approach this individual, explain your research design and ask for assistance. Finally, this data collection technique requires experience and skill. You may want to find someone who has experience and ask for an opportunity to work with them in order to study how it is done.

When you cannot get access to the arena of the group you are interested in studying, you can use other methods to gather data. Don’t forget the data that can be gathered by
carefully examining pictures and video coverage of social behavior. As a result of the increase and development of global communications technology, our ability to gather data and be participant observers of events as they unfold in many areas of the world from our armchairs is greatly enhanced by the advent of 24 hour global cable news coverage. It should be noted that there is an inherent bias in the types of pictures and video feed that is presented on news programs. The pictures are selected on the basis of their impact and may give a misleading representation of the phenomenon being studied. However, from a sociologist’s perspective, the presentation of a group’s activities in video and broadcast news may be a valuable source of data when discussing the label that is associated with the group. However, remember that much of what is squeezed into a brief news broadcast is an overview of the issue and should be regarded as a starting point and not the complete picture. If possible, find video feed and pictures, beyond those presented in the evening news, that give an overall picture of the phenomenon you are studying.

Personal interviews are considered excellent sources for studying details surrounding the factors that contribute to why people commit deviant behaviors. Interviews can be conducted with such personnel as group leaders, group members, victims and members of the general public who might be in a position to provide information. Prepare an agenda of questions based on the information you have gathered from your data searches, newspaper reports, television broadcasts and other sources. You may find that once you start interviewing a person the information flows in such a way that you do not need to ask specific questions. In any case, make sure that you tape (with permission) each interview and/or take very thorough notes.

Finally, keep in mind throughout your study that you should expect to encounter problems with finding data, any data. The data that you find will have errors and, particularly in
the case of news media data, may have been edited and filtered by others. However, if the analysis of social behavior was an easy task, there would not be a need for sociologists.

**Presentation Skills**

We have discussed the problems associated with data collection. This is a very important issue to keep in mind when preparing your analysis for presentation. Do not let the need to present a brief presentation curtail your data collection efforts. Gather as much data about your topic of interest as you can find. Search for those elusive pieces of data and make note, in your presentation, of the difficulties encountered in finding data. As you will no doubt discover, you will have gathered an overwhelming amount of data on which to base your analysis.

Since you don’t want people to fall asleep during your presentation, you need to carefully design a presentation that deals with your prioritized points of interest in an interesting and thought-provoking manner. First of all, you need to consider the preparation of a series of different reports, designed for different audiences. You may find that your audiences may run the gamut from the general public to an official presentation to a government agency. If at all possible, prepare a multimedia presentation that can be routinely used with boilerplate text adapted for your target audience. The use of illustrative materials that assist you in the identification of normal or deviant behavior such as photographs, video clips and any recordings of interviews event are powerful motivators for the audience to focus on your presentation.

Remember that you are planning to present data and findings on the topic of deviance. Your audience may have pre-conceived opinions and views about this topic before you make your presentation. You may have certain opinions about this topic. However, your responsibility as a sociologist is to present the findings in an objective manner leaving your personal values out of the presentation. The moral responsibility you have to present your
findings in an objective manner is particularly important in situations where the data does not support the general views and opinions of the audience. If you find yourself in the situation of presenting a report that is diametrically opposite the general opinions and views held by your audience, you might want to think about discussing the findings with a smaller audience of principals and prepare them for these findings.

As a sociologist, it is not your job to assign blame but to analyze social behavior. While not assigning blame, you should feel comfortable pointing out in your report the conditions that are conducive for the emergence of deviant behavior and how social structures and processes can be changed or re-designed to accommodate the emerging deviant behavior or to discourage further deviant acts. Make a brief concise presentation that focuses on providing answers to the main issues of interest to your audience. Prepare additional information in a multimedia format that will enable you to answer additional questions on areas that might be of interest to the audience. Listen carefully to the questions you are asked and frame your answers based on the data gathered or on your experience as a sociologist. Avoid the trap of being drawn into a discussion of based on value statements and anecdotal examples of deviant behavior.

**Sociologist as Expert**

As we have discussed in this chapter, deviance is much more than breaking a socially accepted rule or norm. As sociologists we want to know why this deviance is occurring, how people are responding to it and what its impact is on individuals, groups and societies. In order to do this, one needs to be able to look at a diverse array of factors and ascertain their relationship with the deviant act. The training you have received in sociology should enable you to successfully accomplish this.

As a sociologist you will quickly understand that the existing norms may be viewed from
different perspectives with different definitions. You will automatically begin to develop scenarios on the factors which separate deviant definitions from the more socially accepted one. You will turn to your sociological perspective tool kit to triangulate reasons why the deviance is occurring. From a consensus perspective you will look for indicators of social structure, process and control. From a conflict perspective, you will identify who makes and controls the socially accepted definitions and how they are enforced. From an interactionist perspective, you will ascertain how the norms are defined among and across a number of groups.

Also, as a sociologist, you will have the ability to place the deviant behavior in its social context. Is the deviant behavior situationally defined? Is it a response to an unachievable norm or is it really an acceptable norm within a smaller sub-culture or group? Because of your skills in looking at the ‘broad picture’ you will be able to ascertain the scope and magnitude of the deviance. Is it at the micro level affecting only the individual committing it or at the meso level affecting families, places of work and communities. Finally, is the deviance of such magnitude that it is influencing society and, potentially, social change?

Probably the greatest advantage that you have as a sociologist in studying deviant behavior is your ability to view the deviant definitions and acts objectively. While we all have our own personal beliefs and feelings, you have been trained to minimize these as you investigate the behavior. This is not to say that you approve of or condone the behavior; it does say that you will “take on the role of others” while attempting to understand the conditions and motivations that caused the action. Having this skill is extremely important in finding complete and accurate information and then applying this intelligence to resolve the problem or help to direct public policy making.

**Case Study**

174
The Case:

Recent news reports have focused on an arrest in a rural county in the heartland of America. Five individuals were arrested following a routine evening police stop for speeding. A subsequent search of the vehicle yielded a sophisticated cache of weapons; large automatic weapons, assault rifles, pistols, hand revolvers, manufactured and hand-made ammunition, night vision goggles, gas masks, and a fully operational sophisticated wireless communications system. The five arrested, three men and two women, were wearing full camouflage uniforms. Papers gathered in the search of the vehicle detailed plans for exploding a series of pipe bombs at the local power station. The five individuals were released on bail pending their trial. No-one showed up on the day of the trial. Instead a press release by the public relations director of a militia organization stated that these five individuals were conducting the legal business of their organization and that the court in which they had been asked to appear did not have any legal jurisdiction over them.

Most new members of militia organizations are required to take an oath that includes such promises as a pledge to abide by the rules and constitution of their own states; an agreement to obey all legal laws, federal, state and local; a promise to protect and defend America from all foreign and domestic enemies; and a vow of allegiance to the Constitution. There appears to be both norm conflict here and the potential for acts of deviance and perhaps criminal acts of destruction.

As a sociologist, you have been asked to make a presentation to a small regional committee of criminal justice professionals. The purpose of your presentation is to educate this group on the need for the inclusion of a social science component in their plan for the establishment of a ‘Tactical Terrorist Response Unit.’ in the region. The establishment of this
unit has been mandated by the federal government in response to recent unexplained incidents, such as the one just described here. You have two weeks to prepare your presentation. You are responsible for all costs incurred in the preparation of this report.

**Possible Solutions:**

Deviance is generally defined as the violation of social norms in a society. As you have learned in this chapter, studying deviance is not as easy as it appears. The usual studies of deviance center around acts of criminal justice where the line between legal and illegal is seemingly clear and identifiable. Here we are going to use a different kind of example to encourage you to stretch your skills of analysis in an area where there is a wealth of data to access. Remember that you are not preparing a presentation that is designed to inform about militia, but rather you are preparing a presentation that demonstrates the contribution that a social science perspective can bring to the proposed task-force unit. Once again, you are strongly recommended to use a multi-method approach.

1. **Identification of the Phenomenon**

What has been presented here to you in this case study is one of the most complex issues facing American society today. Your audience will most likely have an interpretation of the concept of ‘militia’ that is influenced by their concern for social control issues in society. Your task is to expand this perspective to permit the understanding of how social groups work and increase the skill of differentiating illegal acts of rebellion from legal acts of protest.

A. **Social Groups.**

Develop a brief report that reviews the sociological research about the formation of social groups and organizations and the criteria for the presence of deviance from the social norms of society in certain groups. Your report should include a description of the role of the members
of fringe organizations in the maintenance and structure of the central social group.

B. Social Movements

Prepare a brief report that reviews the formation of social movements and the criteria for deviance in this groups.

C. Cultural Issues of Interest

Review and prepare a brief report on research into the current intense interest in the approach of the new millennium and the rhetoric of doom and activism.

D. Terrorism

Define the term ‘terrorism’ making sure that you deal with the topic of increasing interest, the threat of domestic terrorism.

E. Militia or Patriot

Define the term ‘militia.’ This is not as easy a task as it sounds. You will need to sharpen your knowledge of the wording and interpretation of the Second Amendment to the Constitution regarding the ‘right to bear arms’ and the important role that this plays in the mission and objectives of the militia movement. You will need to review your history archives to familiarize yourself with the history of the militia movement. What are the differences between the old and new militia movements? You will also need to include a report dealing with the differentiation between the term ‘patriot’ and ‘militia.’ What are the criteria by which you would, as a sociologist, assess the potential for violence by a militia group?

F. Sociological Research Skills

Present a brief overview of the sociological skills that can be used to provide data and continuous analysis. For example, the use of the case study methodology, content analysis, multivariate data techniques, interviewing skills and analysis of indicators from the sociological
perspective.

2. **Justification of the need for a sociologist’s perspective in the Task Force unit.**

   Having presented the previously described sociological concepts, you will be in a position to present a justification that is based on the contributions that a sociologist can make to the proposed program.

   • The ability to build a comprehensive sociological database based on regional demographics and access to current data.
   
   • The ability to place deviant behavior in its social context and provide assistance with identifying the scope and magnitude of the deviant behavior.
   
   • The ability to formulate and coordinate regional analyses of the potential for an increase or decrease in deviant behavior.

3. **Tentative Plan and Proposed Budget.**

   Prepare a proposal on how you would go about making a contribution as a sociologist to the new proposed task-force and an estimate of the resources that will, at a minimum, necessary for the project. It is extremely important to inform the committee that much of the data currently available is not always the most accurate and that analysis based on erroneous data is sometimes worse that no data at all.

**Exercises**

The study of deviant social behavior is best conducted using a multi-method approach. If at all possible, the best way to gain an understanding of how social groups are organized and what constitutes deviance is to conduct an intense detailed study of a group. The following exercises are designed to help you begin to understand the various layers of analysis that need to be completed before you can begin to answer questions about deviance. These exercises make use
of basic research skills such as case study analysis, secondary data analysis, content analysis of news and print media. One of the major problems sometimes facing an investigator studying a topic such as this is how to conduct an objective study in an area where the investigator has strong personal opinions. This is a difficult assignment but mastery of the research skills you are learning will go a long way towards assisting you to gather objective, empirical data.

A. Select four social groups for a small case-study. Select two of the groups on the basis of their identity as mainstream American social groups. Select two other groups who are not identified as members of mainstream America. Identify the mission, goals and objectives of each group. Compare and contrast the norms of each group. Compare and contrast the ritualism of each social group. Rate each group in terms of its capacity for being traditional or innovative, ritualistic or non-ritualistic, rebellious or conservative. Finally, on the basis of the analysis you have just conducted, rank each group of normal to deviant.

What else do you think needs to be included in this analysis?

B. Identify three groups where their public image can be attributed to the tenets of labeling theory. Track the development of the label associated with the group. Find and describe the nature of any threats to the label presently enjoyed by any of these social groups. For example, ten years ago, tele-evangelists enjoyed the label and positive image of doing God’s work and millions of dollars in donations. However, a number of tele-evangelists and their organizations became the targets of intense media scrutiny into the personal behavior of the organization officers and the financial affairs of the organization. Many of these tele-evangelist organizations did not survive the investigations.

C. Most of us went through our school experience wanting to be a member of the ‘in-
crowd.’ Some of us wanted to be members of other kinds of groups. What is the
difference between a ‘good’ gang and the other kind of gang? (This exercise is not as
easy as it appears. You will be tempted to answer in an emotional manner. Frame your
answer, including personal observations, using your skills as a sociologist.)

D. We have always been told that police officers are sworn to uphold the law. One the other
hand, other social control forces like the FBI and CIA may become involved in activities
that do not appear, on the surface, to be upholding the law. For example, the use of such
activities as wire tapping, searching suspects home, and video and surveillance
techniques.

Based on what you have learned about deviant behavior, how would you explain the
behavior of the groups we have described here?