



Deviance and a Social Construct : An in Class Activity

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Abstract:

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

Details:

Resource Types	Class Activity
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Subject Area	Social Control
Class Level	College 200
Class Size	
Language	English

DEVIANCE AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT: AN IN CLASS ACTIVITY

Monika J. Ulrich

Purpose: To learn how deviance is socially determined

Time: 30 minutes

Preparation: Copy and pass out handout

Instructions to Students:

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

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

Instructor's Notes:

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

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

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