

PART V

Deviance



The last time I visited a state prison, it was to interview a notorious serial killer. As you might expect, our conversation began in a rather tentative manner. I tried to figure out what he was thinking; he tried to figure out what I was up to. I sized him up; he sized me up. Our first 30 minutes together consisted of an exchange of polite trivialities. We talked about most everything—everything, that is, except what I had come to discuss in the first place: the heinous crimes for which he had been convicted.

If you've ever visited a prison, you probably know how uncomfortable it can be to talk with inmates, at least initially. There is usually a great deal of anxiety, and it gets in the way of honest communication.

Part of the problem involves what sociologist Erving Goffman referred to as the management of spoiled identity. An imprisoned serial murderer has been stigmatized; he is totally discredited among those who live beyond the prison walls. He knows that I know, and I know that he knows that I know. There is no way for him to conceal the fact that he has been found guilty of murdering 12 young women, even if he continues to proclaim his innocence (which serial killers almost always do). The prison walls tell it all. So the best we can expect to do is to minimize the discomfort generated by his deviance—and that takes both time and effort.

Deviance refers to any behavior of an individual that violates the norms and values of a group or society generally. Many acts of deviance are rather harmless: for example, parking in a loading zone or breaking a curfew. Other acts of deviance are incredibly dangerous and violent.

When someone commits a severely deviant act, he or she may be stigmatized. In other words, the violation of society's rules is regarded as so extreme that an entire human being, and not just a particular behavior, gets discredited. Clearly, serial killers fit this category. But as suggested in "Fat Chance in a Slim World," so do individuals who are overweight by conventional standards—and they haven't broken any laws at all! Fat is too often regarded as a symptom of not just illness but a lack of moral fiber or willpower. To some extent, people who are too short, tall, or thin also bear the burden.

Mentally ill patients represent another group of stigmatized people. Some very depressed individuals would rather conceal their pain and suffering than risk being rejected by the important people in their lives. As suggested in "You Must Get Ill First; Then You Recover," those mental patients who are hospitalized also risk labeling. According to Erving Goffman, they may be thoroughly resocialized so that they can be easily managed and controlled. Goffman contends that new patients learn quickly what is required of them to get along while institutionalized and later to be released. Rosenhan's experiment in the same essay clearly indicates what happens when mental patients refuse to cooperate—they continue to be regarded as sick.

French sociologist Émile Durkheim once observed that deviant behavior actually helps unite the members of a society by focusing attention on the validity of its moral order. In the face of a deviant act—for example, a heinous crime—the members of a group feel challenged, even threatened. They no longer take for granted the important values that they share. Instead, they rally their forces to encourage and support the legitimacy of behaving correctly. Durkheim also suggested that punishing the individual who commits a deviant act similarly reconfirms behavior that conforms to a group's cultural standards. Punishment sends a message to every member of society: "Listen, buddy. Break the rules and the same thing will happen to you!" Numerous Americans, concerned about our soaring crime rate, would gladly base their support of capital punishment on Durkheim's view of deviance: Sending a killer to the electric chair also sends a message to potential killers everywhere. Thus, capital punishment is often justified by the fact that it might serve as a deterrent to violent crime. As indicated in "Is the Death Penalty Only a Vehicle for Revenge?" however, there is very little evidence to suggest that capital punishment actually deters future murders (although it definitely deters the condemned killer from killing again). Even if most Americans favor capital punishment, most criminologists seem to agree that the swift and certain imposition of a life sentence without parole is an effective alternative to the death penalty.

First-degree murderers should never be eligible for parole or furlough, and their sentences should never be commuted by a future governor who believes in their rehabilitation. As criminologist James A. Fox and I have argued, "We need a 'life sentence without hope.'" Let me pause, at this point, to once again raise the question of "value-free" sociology. In "Is the Death Penalty Only a Vehicle for Revenge?" I take a definite stand—based on evidence collected by criminologists but nevertheless a definite stand—on a controversial issue. You should be aware that some sociologists would cringe at the very thought of this. In their view, the advocacy role is antithetical to the goals of the "science of sociology." Not everyone would agree, however. Sociologist Howard Becker once argued just the opposite: that sociologists must take sides in favor of important values and pressing concerns. For him, the advocacy role is not only consistent with but essential to the work of sociology.

I am especially sure that the death penalty would have little impact on mass murderers. Those who kill several victims at a time would hardly be deterred by either a life sentence or an execution. Indeed, their killing spree is often an act of suicide anyway; but before taking their own life, they have decided to get even with all of those individuals they blame for having caused their problems—all women, all foreigners, all postal workers, and so

on. Even if suicide is their intention, it is less often the outcome. About one third of all mass killers end up taking their own lives. Many more commit “suicide by cop,” whereby they refuse to drop their weapon so as to force law enforcement to do what they could not—to gun them down. Still others decide to let the state do what they could not—they live long enough to be tried and convicted of first-degree murder and receive the death penalty.

Historically, the death penalty has been discriminatory in its application. For crimes of equivalent severity, black defendants were more likely than their white counterparts to be executed by the state. In 1972, the Supreme Court declared the death penalty unconstitutional because it was being applied in an uneven, capricious manner. In 1976, it was reinstated but only if applied under strict guidelines. Even today, there is evidence that the administration of the death penalty is uneven. Offenders who kill white victims are executed more often than offenders who kill black victims. Since 1976, on a national level, 223 black defendants have been executed for murdering white victims, but only 15 white defendants have been executed for the death of a black victim.

One of the more challenging yet important tasks of sociology is to be able to predict deviant behavior: for example, who will turn out to be a hardened criminal and who won't. Although we are still far from being able to make such predictions, a recent study, which I coauthored with Arnold Arluke, suggests that animal abuse may be a warning sign for violence committed against humans. In fact, our study indicates that cruelty toward animals may be linked with all forms of antisocial behavior, both violent and nonviolent. Of course, this clearly does not mean that every child who intentionally harms a dog or a cat will grow up to be a hardened criminal. Indeed, most will not. This leaves us in the uncomfortable position of understanding an important factor *symptomatic of* many forms of deviant behavior but of being unable to predict future behavior. The problem is one of false positives—many abusers grow up and out of their deviant behavior.

Of course, some youngsters don't wait to grow up before they exhibit criminal behavior. This was made painfully clear as investigators around the country—and especially in Southern states—attempted to solve the hundreds of cases of arson being targeted at America's churches during the 1990s. It very quickly became obvious that black churches were being disproportionately victimized, though many white churches had been burned as well.

As indicated in “America's Youngsters Are Responsible for Church Burnings,” the overrepresentation of black churches gave some legitimacy to the opinion that many of the burnings were racially inspired. As it turned out, however, most of the burnings of black churches could not be pinned

on any conspiracy on the part of organized hate groups. Sadly, most of the assailants represented America's future—its children.

Children are, however, more likely to be the victims than the perpetrators of criminal behavior. Across the country, states have imposed a series of measures to protect their youngsters from dangerous sexual predators who have served their sentences and have been released back into the community. As a result, sex offenders are required to register with the local police, may find their photos and addresses on Internet Web sites, may be restricted from coming within a specified distance of schools and playgrounds, and may be forced by irate neighbors to leave their jobs and homes. Many registered (and unregistered) sex offenders have, as a result, been ejected from shelters and now live on the streets, where supervision is totally lacking.

Fat Chance in a Slim World

We Believe It's the Size of a Book's Cover That Counts

A black woman in Philadelphia recently wrote me, complaining about the way she was treated by other people. Among other things, she rarely dated, had few friends, and was forced to settle for a job for which she was overqualified. Moreover, passengers on buses and trains often stared at her with pity or scorn, while workers at the office rarely included her in their water-cooler conversations.

The letter writer attributed these difficulties not to her gender or race but to the fact that she was vastly overweight by conventional standards. Her letter brought to mind the unfortunate victims of such illnesses as cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer's disease who have the unavoidable symptoms of an illness over which they have little, if any, control. But they are typically treated with compassion and sympathy.

Curiously enough, fat people frequently receive contempt rather than compassion, unless their obesity can be attributed to some physical ailment (e.g., a glandular condition). Otherwise, they are seen as having caused their own problem by some combination of excessive impulsivity and lack of moral fiber. Not unlike prostitutes, ex-cons, and homeless people, they may be regarded as lacking in the self-control and willpower necessary to lead a healthy, normal life. In addition, this discrimination has been directed more often at women than at men over the years.

The term *fat person* is therefore more than a description of somebody's weight, body type, or illness; more often than not, it is also used to stigmatize or discredit an entire group of human beings by making their belt size an excuse for bigotry. The lady from Philadelphia may have been correct: Research

suggests that people who are overweight by our standards are often viewed as undesirable dates and mates. They frequently have trouble getting married, going to college, obtaining credit from a bank, or being promoted. In short, they are excluded, exploited, and oppressed.

Stigmatizing fat people is, of course, only one expression of a much more general tendency in our culture: the tendency to judge others by their looks rather than their intelligence, talent, or character. Study after study suggests that what is beautiful is good. That is, attractive individuals are more likely to be preferred as dates, to be popular with their friends, to be cuddled and kissed as newborns, to achieve high grades in school, to be disciplined less severely by their parents, to be recommended for a job after a personal interview, and to have their written work judged favorably.

By conventional American wisdom, fat is as ugly and deviant as thin is beautiful. We are so infatuated with being slim and trim that it is indeed hard to imagine anything else. Yet the desirability of particular body types and body weight varies from culture to culture. Beginning with the ancient world, fat has not always been universally despised. Instead, fat people were often respected, if not admired, throughout history. Even Cleopatra was fat by our standards, although by the standards of her own time and culture she was a raving beauty. Renoir's French Impressionist masterpieces similarly portrayed a version of the female body that today would be considered massive, huge, and fat rather than beautiful. And in cultures where food was in short supply, obesity was often used to validate personal success. Under such circumstances, rich people could afford to eat enough to be fat and therefore to survive. Skinny was therefore a sign of neither good health nor beauty but a symptom of poverty and illness.

Until the Roaring Twenties, the large and voluptuous version of feminine beauty continued to dominate in our culture. But the flappers changed all this by bobbing their hair, binding their breasts, and, by some accounts, trying to resemble adolescent boys. While many women of the 1920s moved toward feminine power, others retreated from it by shrinking their bodies in fad diets. The result was that during this era, the suffragette movement succeeded and women got the vote, but many men felt threatened. All of a sudden, they preferred women who were small, petite, and thin, who looked powerless.

Given the importance of physical attractiveness in defining the value and achievement of females, it should come as no surprise that American women have come under extreme pressure to be unrealistically slim and trim. This may have made many women dissatisfied with their bodies and mistakenly convinced them that mastery was possible only by controlling their weight.

Women constitute 90% of those afflicted with the eating disorder anorexia nervosa and are the majority of those who join organizations such as Weight Watchers and Diet Workshop. Women are also more likely than men to suffer from compulsive overeating and obesity.

Since the women's movement of the 1960s, we seem to have become even more preoccupied with being slim and trim. *Playboy* centerfolds and contestants in the Miss America pageant have become increasingly thin.

Leading women's magazines publish more and more articles about diets and dieting. Physicians offer drastic medical cures, such as stomach stapling for obesity and liposuction surgery for problem areas like saddlebag thighs, protuberant abdomens, buttocks, love handles, fatty knees, and redundant chins. And the best-seller list inevitably contains a disproportionate number of books promising miraculous methods of weight reduction.

In the face of all this, signs of an incipient cultural rebellion against crash dieting and irrational thinness have emerged. A couple of decades earlier, popular books such as Millman's (1980) *Such a Pretty Face*, Orbach's (1978) *Fat Is a Feminist Issue*, and Chernin's (1981) *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness* began taking their place in bookstores alongside the diet manuals. But rather than urge obedience to the conventional standards of beauty, these newer books exposed the dangers to physical and mental health due to rapid and repeated weight loss. Rather than focus on individual change, they placed the blame for our excessive concern with being skinny on sexism and the socialization of women to absurd cultural standards. In 2004, the newly established tradition was continued with the publication of Kathleen Lebesco's *Revolting Bodies?: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*.

The merchants of fashion have also sensed a cultural change in the offing. Growing numbers of dress shops now specialize in designer fashions for size 14 and over and flattering designs in better plus-size fashions. Moreover, based on a good deal of evidence from around the world, physicians have revised their weight standards so that what was formerly considered 10 or 15 pounds overweight is now regarded as optimal. For the first time in decades, some popular female entertainers—Jennifer Lopez—are being revered for their derrieres.

As a final element in this dynamic, organizations such as the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) have helped fat people—even those considered obese—to gain a more favorable self-image. Rather than automatically advising its members to diet, NAAFA calls attention to the fact that fat people are often the victims of prejudice and discrimination. It recognizes the dangers in rapid and repeated weight loss and focuses

instead on improving the way that fat people are treated on the job, as customers, and in social situations.

Taking its cue from black organizations, which reject words originating in the white community, such as *Negro* and *colored*, NAAFA prefers to use the term *fat* rather than *overweight* or *obese*. In this way, it refuses to conceal the issue in euphemisms, refuses to accept the stigma, and emphasizes that fat can be beautiful.

Unfortunately, however, our culture continues to give fat people a double message. On the one hand, we advise them to be themselves and to accept their body image regardless of social pressures to conform to some arbitrary standard of beauty. On the other hand, we urge them to go on a diet so that they will no longer be deviant. While the rhetoric may be confusing, it is also revealing. All things considered, our aversion is deeply embedded in our culture and is likely to remain with us for some time to come.

You Must Get Ill First; Then You Recover

Checking Out of a Mental Hospital May Be Harder Than Checking In

Sociologist Erving Goffman's study of the way patients were treated in a mental hospital yielded some frightening conclusions. He found that the hospital staff assumed absolute power to define how patients should think and behave. The institution gained total control over the terms by which its patients defined themselves. Inmates were thoroughly resocialized so that they could be easily managed and controlled.

According to Goffman, new patients learned quickly what was required of them to get along while institutionalized and later to be released. They were asked to discard their old self-concepts—those they had used on the outside—and to adopt a new set of self-definitions taught by the staff. First and foremost, inmates were to abandon the normal concept that they were sane or healthy and instead see themselves as sick and therefore in need of help. Admitting that they were psychologically ill was regarded as a patient's first step along the road to recovery. Conversely, any claim that an inmate was well was regarded as a symptom of severe mental disease.

As patients spent more and more time in the hospital, larger areas of their self-concept were turned upside down. Boredom was regarded as a sign of depression, anger as acting out, independence as rebelliousness and irrationality, and a desire for privacy as withdrawal. It took no time at all for inmates to recognize that being resocialized by the institution to accept the role of a mentally ill person was the only way to be rewarded while confined and then later regarded as cured. This meant not being a management

problem for the staff—submitting to the hospital routines, which included cooperation in taking medications and going to therapy sessions. Otherwise, a patient might remain in the institution indefinitely.

Ideally, of course, whether a patient is defined by the hospital staff as healthy or sick and viewed as ready for release should be based strictly on his or her symptoms. In reality, however, the social setting of a mental hospital also comes into play in defining the situation. This brings up an interesting question that sounds very much like the plot from an old movie: If perfectly normal and healthy people were secretly admitted to a mental hospital, would they be able to convince the staff that they were well, that they didn't belong, and that they should be released? Or would they be defined by the rules of hospital life as rebellious, irrational, depressed, and therefore in need of continuing hospitalization? A classic study by D. L. Rosenhan looked at exactly this question. He had eight sane individuals—five men and three women representing a range of ages and occupations—secretly admitted to one of a number of mental hospitals across the country. Each of Rosenhan's pseudopatients was totally free of any symptoms of mental illness; all of them gained admission by complaining that they had been hearing voices. No hospital staff members were informed about the study.

Based only on this one symptom, hearing voices, all but one of the pseudopatients were diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia. Moreover, once inside the hospital, the pseudopatients stopped expressing any symptoms of illness. They spoke and behaved normally for the entire duration of their stay.

When the pseudopatients expressed their desire to be discharged, they were told that release depended on the ability of a patient to convince the staff that he or she was sane. Yet despite their normal behavior, the average length of hospitalization for the group was 19 days. One of them failed to be released for 52 days. Finally, all of the pseudopatients were discharged—but with a diagnosis of schizophrenia in remission. In other words, not one was able to convince a hospital staff of his or her sanity, only that the symptoms of his or her illness had subsided.

In case you were wondering whether anyone, staff or not, would have been fooled by Rosenhan's band of pseudopatients, we have an answer for you. Believe it or not, some 25% of the other patients on the admissions wards accused the pseudopatients of faking insanity—the real patients guessed that the imposters were actually professors or reporters who were in the hospital to conduct a study!

Is the Death Penalty Only a Vehicle for Revenge?

An Ardent Abolitionist
States His Case

Whenever I articulate my opposition to the death penalty, I feel like a voice in the wilderness. More than 65% of all Americans favor the death penalty, and the remaining 35% would probably be willing to make an exception if it meant eliminating the Jeffrey Dahmers and the John Wayne Gacys of the world. In fact, the United States has the dubious distinction of being the only remaining Western nation not to have abolished the death penalty for civil homicide.

Some proponents of capital punishment assert that legislators should enact death penalty laws because it is the will of the people. Well, it is true that the majority of Americans support capital punishment—*but only* if they are not given an alternative that they like better. When they are offered an option to capital punishment such as life without parole, their support for the death penalty drops to 50%—even lower when you throw in compensating the victim's family.

Unfortunately, many of our citizens really aren't informed enough about criminal justice policy to make a rational decision about crime and punishment. In one survey, pollsters found that only a fraction of the residents of Massachusetts—about 3%—even knew that the Commonwealth's penalty for first-degree murder was life without parole. One third of all Massachusetts citizens said they believed such offenders would be out of prison in fewer than 10 years; another 11% said they had no idea at all what happened to first-degree murderers in the state.

But the reason underlying much of the support of executions, according to a survey conducted for *ABC News* and the *Washington Post*, is usually revenge or retribution. Americans believe that the most serious crimes deserve the most severe punishment. As the Old Testament points out, “Thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.”

And, I admit, it’s not hard to understand why revenge seems sweet. People are fed up with violent crime, believing that it is out of control and of epidemic proportions. They want to do something about it. Whether or not I agree with the extremity of the public reaction, I can understand why Gacy’s execution by the state of Illinois was seen by many as a cause for celebration. The world lost one of its most despicable killers. Whether or not I believe it to be a proper sentence, I can see why Danny Rolling’s execution by the state of Florida in 2006 brought a smile to the faces of concerned residents of the Sunshine State. After all, for nothing short of sadistic purposes, Rolling had butchered five beautiful young college students in the community of Gainesville.

The arguments for the death penalty, however, typically fall outside the realm of empirical inquiry. Instead, they are often emotionally charged, arguing that convicted killers deserve to die or that demonstrated by empirical inquiry. These three important issues involve cost, deterrence, and protection. Getting even is valuable as a measure of psychological compensation for victims and society. As an abolitionist, however, I rest my entire case on the weight of economic and social issues that can be tested for their accuracy.

Many people ask why we should spend hard-earned taxpayer money to imprison a murderer when we could just as easily execute him at much lower cost. But the fixed costs of running a maximum-security prison are little affected by the presence of a few additional inmates serving life sentences for first-degree murder. The warden still has to be paid, and the heat still has to be run. Moreover, because of the complex and lengthy trials, the large number of expert witnesses and forensic tests, and the appeals process required by the Supreme Court in capital cases, it actually costs less to imprison a killer than to execute one. In Florida, for example, the average cost of a case that results in execution is \$3.2 million, whereas the estimated cost of imprisonment for 40 years is slightly more than \$500,000. And to those who argue, “If it costs so much to carry out the appeals process, then take him out back and string him up,” consider the number of errors that have been made under less stringent requirements: Since 1900, some 139 people have been sent to death who were later proven innocent. At least 23 of them were exonerated only after the executions had been carried out.

Proponents of the death penalty also claim that it deters violent criminals. They believe we need to execute murderers to send messages to potential

killers that, if they can't control their murderous behavior, the same thing will happen to them.

Yet most of the evidence suggests that the death penalty has little if any effect on killings. In a study of 14 nations in which the death penalty was eliminated, criminologists Dane Archer and Rosemary Gartner report, for example, that abolition was followed more often than not by a reduction in national homicide rates. For example, homicide dropped 59% in Finland, 30% in Italy, 63% in Sweden, and 46% in Switzerland. In only 5 of these 14 countries did homicide increase at all. Even more ironically, research conducted by criminologist William Bowers suggests that the murder rate actually rises for a short period of time after the killer has been executed, producing what he calls a "brutalization effect." That is, would-be murderers apparently identify more with the state executioner than they do with the inmate.

The third argument, of course, is that capital punishment protects society by guaranteeing that killers like Charles Manson will never be paroled. And certainly, capital punishment would make sure that particular murderers never kill again. But before I support the death penalty, I would want to know whether an alternative exists for protecting society—for making sure that a killer isn't granted another opportunity—without taking human life. If the alternative in response to a brutal, hideous murder is life imprisonment with parole eligibility, I am indeed in favor of the death penalty. If, however, the alternative is a life sentence without the possibility of ever being paroled, capital punishment becomes unnecessary for the protection of society, and I am therefore against it.

In fact, I cringe whenever I hear that Charles Manson is being considered for parole, because I know what people will say: The criminal justice system is soft on murderers. We should be executing those who commit heinous crimes. Actually, Charles Manson did receive the death penalty.

But back in 1972, the Supreme Court struck down capital punishment because it was being applied in an uneven, capricious manner. At that point, any murderer on death row was instead given the next most severe sentence under state law. In California, that sentence was a life sentence with parole eligibility. As a result, Charles Manson was then eligible for parole after serving only 7 years.

A series of rulings by the Supreme Court in 1976 paved the way for states to restore the death penalty but only when applied under strict guidelines. In some states (e.g., California), those convicted of murder continue to become eligible for parole after serving only several years in prison, but if the court adds the "special circumstances" provision, the only possible sentences are either death or life imprisonment without parole eligibility.

Most states now have special-circumstances statutes for heinous crimes, such as multiple murder or murder with rape. Yet the “strict guidelines” under which the Supreme Court gave its blessings to capital punishment apparently have not worked. Racial discrimination continues to exist. The killers of white victims are much more likely than the killers of black victims to receive the death penalty. Moreover, innocent people continue to be condemned to die, often on the basis of faulty eyewitness evidence. This recognition recently led the former governor of Illinois—a staunch advocate of capital punishment—to declare a moratorium on the death penalty until such time that the state is comfortable that it is not executing innocent people. In some states (e.g., Massachusetts), all first-degree murderers are ineligible for parole, so no special statute is required. Under such conditions, the death penalty is unnecessary as a means for protecting society from vicious killers, because we can instead lock them up and throw away the key.

Actually, many proponents of the death penalty raise the issues of cost, deterrence, and protection of society only to rationalize what essentially is a thirst for revenge. This can be seen most clearly in the public response to heinous crimes.

In December 1987, Ronald Gene Simmons brutally murdered 16 people in Russellville, Arkansas, in the largest family massacre in American history. When the residents of Russellville learned that Simmons had suffocated the young children in his family and that he had had an incestuous relationship with his married daughter, cries for the death penalty were heard loud and clear throughout Arkansas. In 1989, Simmons was convicted of multiple murders and sentenced to die by means of lethal injection. Similarly, on December 26, 2000, Michael McDermott, a 43-year-old employee of Edgewater Technology in Wakefield, Massachusetts, shot to death seven of his coworkers. Public outrage quickly took the form of demands for Massachusetts legislators to enact a death penalty statute.

Florida certainly did get a measure of self-satisfaction in October 2006 by executing serial killer Danny Rolling; the same can be said for the state of Illinois when it executed John Wayne Gacy, the notorious serial killer, in 1994. For many Americans, the opportunity to get even with a serial killer is reason enough to apply the death penalty. But for those few who instead believe that capital punishment can be justified only to the extent that it protects society’s members or serves as an effective deterrent, execution by the state is cruel and unnecessary punishment. In a civilized society, our best defense against wild animals is to lock them in cages so they can’t get to the rest of us.

Animal Cruelty and Human Violence

Is There a Connection?

Arnold Arluke and Jack Levin

In the suburbs of Jackson, Mississippi, 16-year-old Luke Woodham allegedly killed two girls and injured seven other students before being subdued by a Pearl High School administrator. Earlier that day, Mr. Woodham's mother was found stabbed to death, and he was charged with the murder.

These killings have sparked nationwide attention in part because of bizarre plans by Mr. Woodham, "a self-proclaimed Satanist," and his fellow "cult" members to lay siege on the school, ignite explosives, cut telephone lines, and kill various people. A far more common event could have warned authorities that Mr. Woodham was ready to explode, but nobody paid attention to it.

More than 6 months earlier, the defendant and one of his friends repeatedly beat Woodham's dog, wrapped it in bags, set it on fire, and threw it into a pond. Mr. Woodham ostensibly wrote, "I made my first kill. . . . The victim was a loved one, my dear dog Sparkle. . . . I will never forget the howl she made. It sounded almost human." Research strongly suggests that understanding the causes and consequences of violence toward animals may be important in the effort to fight crime against humans. A link has long been suspected between cruelty to animals and human violence. In the 1960s, for example, psychiatrist John Macdonald first suggested that those individuals who later become homicidal begin in childhood by torturing small animals. Subsequent research on prisoners and abusive domestic partners supported Macdonald's position.

Indeed, a 3-year study we recently conducted with the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals examined the relationship between violence against animals and crime in the general population. We discovered that people who abused animals were five times more likely than those who did not to commit violent crimes against people—to assault, rape, or rob them.

Surprisingly, animal abuse was found to be linked with many types of nonviolent crimes as well. Abusers were four times more likely than nonabusers to commit property crimes and three times more likely to be arrested for drug-related offenses and disorderly conduct.

What can be done to reduce animal abuse and to recognize its value as a warning sign of future violence? We urge professionals—district attorneys, judges, police officers, doctors, social workers, teachers, and ministers—to take appropriate measures. Every year thousands of animals around the country are reported as victims of malicious cruelty. A resident of Manatee County, Florida, recently admitted beating to death a neighbor's 11-year-old Rottweiler with a 2-foot club. And, in Iowa, three teenagers were brought to trial and convicted for bludgeoning to death 16 cats in an animal shelter.

If these crimes were committed against children, the abusers would likely face stiff penalties in court, but this would not be so in one of the animal offenses. Even in the most extreme cases, a majority of the animal abusers are not found guilty in court. Most don't even get to trial. When they do, they typically get a slap on the wrist. In some states, only one in ten of those convicted receive jail sentences. And fines are minimal when imposed, averaging \$132.

Most important, incidents of animal cruelty are typically viewed as isolated crimes, having no relationship to other human behavior, such as violence against people. The attitude among criminal justice personnel too frequently seems to be: "Suppose we make a concerted effort to wipe out animal cruelty—so what? When the money is spent, we will still be left fighting rape, murder, assault, burglary, and drug abuse."

There is strong public support to take effective measures. Eighty-one percent of all American adults approve strengthening the enforcement of cruelty laws. About 83% favor teachers, social workers, animal welfare officers, and law enforcement officials sharing information on juveniles who abuse animals as an early warning sign of criminal behavior. And 75% support the establishment of a system for tracking adult animal cruelty offenders as a tool for identifying other kinds of likely violent offenses.

Of course, not every child who tortures animals grows up to become a killer. In fact, many of them later grow up to be decent law-abiding citizens. Yet animal abuse is clearly a warning sign that deserves to be taken seriously in order to intervene before it is too late. A 6-year-old boy who

132 Deviance

enjoys causing the family pet to suffer deserves our attention. His abusive behavior is a clear-cut plea for help. Later on, he might progress from harming dogs and cats to harming people. The lesson is clear enough: By taking animal cruelty more seriously, we might help ourselves.

America's Youngsters Are Responsible for Church Burnings

It's Neither the Klan Nor the White Aryan Resistance

It is tempting to regard the wave of church burnings across the country during the 1990s as some kind of conspiracy involving white supremacist extremists. Yet the evidence suggests something much worse. Most of these racially inspired arsons seem to be the work of America's young people.

Collectively, scapegoating frequently takes the form of "protest by proxy," in which innocent victims substitute for the real source of economic hardship. As growing income inequality continues to take its toll, those Americans for whom the American Dream seems out of reach derive little satisfaction from blaming vague abstractions like global competition, corporate downsizing, or automation. Scapegoating minorities puts a human face on what otherwise would be a nebulous and unintelligible enemy.

Black Americans have always made especially effective scapegoats. Not only were they powerless to strike back effectively, but they had adequate visibility as well. Until 1930, the frequency with which blacks in the South were lynched increased as the value of Southern cotton declined. Black Americans were routinely blamed for downward economic fluctuations that might rationally have been attributed more to changes in the weather than to human intervention.

Criminologist Jack McDevitt and I have studied hundreds of serious crimes directed against individuals because they are different with respect to

race, religion, national origin, or sexual orientation. If the recent strings of church burnings is at all typical of hate attacks generally, very few of them are being committed by members of organized hate groups. Instead, almost two thirds of the arsons will probably turn out to be thrill crimes committed by young people who go out looking to stir up a little excitement at someone else's expense. These youngsters aren't getting along at home, are doing poorly in school, or have dead-end jobs.

Typically they hate themselves as much as they hate their victims and are looking for someone to blame for their personal problems.

Though few arrests have been made, it thus far appears that young people have been disproportionately involved in the church burnings. In one case, a 13-year-old girl was arrested and charged for an act of arson that destroyed the Matthews Murkland Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Three men in their early 20s were prime suspects in the burning of the Lighthouse Prayer Church in Greenville, Texas. Later on, two boys, ages 9 and 10, were charged with destroying Life Christian Assembly Church in North Charleston, South Carolina. A 17-year-old was charged in the burning of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Robeson County, North Carolina.

The good news about thrill hate attacks is that their perpetrators are generally not hardened hatemongers but only naive young adults and teenagers who hardly understand Nazi ideology or Klan slogans. Most of them don't know the Ku Klux Klan from the White Aryan Resistance. With a creative response including education and community service, we might reach many of these youthful offenders in time to turn their lives around and make them into productive citizens.

The bad news is that the string of church burnings reflects a more general trend toward escalating levels of bigotry and intolerance among America's youths. Too many of them feel important only to the extent that they are able to inflict pain and suffering on people who are different in terms of race, religion, or sexual orientation. So they burn, bash, and desecrate in order to feel superior.

In response to hurtful acts of intolerance, our mainstream leaders should send an unequivocal message that they will simply not tolerate intolerance. Strong hate crime laws for repeat offenders is, in this regard, an indispensable tool. Creative alternative sentencing for youthful first offenders—education, community service, and victim restitution—is also essential.

But the most effective approach by far would be to offer our bigoted youngsters some hope for the future. We must reach them with healthy alternatives to prejudice and violence, giving them some reason to feel good about themselves without terrorizing their neighbors.

Keeping Children Safe From Sex Crimes

The Community Approach Sounds Effective but May Do More Harm Than Good

Joseph Edward Duncan III, who allegedly bludgeoned to death three people in northern Idaho and kidnapped two children, killing one of them, represents a tremendous challenge to our criminal justice system. What are we to do with a dangerous Level 3 sex offender who has served his sentence but is likely to repeat his offense?

Duncan had served a 15-year sentence in a Washington state prison for raping a 14-year-old boy and was out on bail for molesting a 6-year-old boy. For every repeat offender who turns his life around, there are several others who commit even more hideous crimes. The typical child sex offender attacks more than 100 children. That is why legislators around the country have recently devoted so much time writing tougher laws to track, restrict, or sentence dangerous rapists and child molesters. While well motivated, almost all such legislation is bound to fail.

Sex offender registries have been ineffective. They make citizens feel safer but do little else. Many dangerous offenders never register. Others register but reoffend. Joseph Duncan was a registered sex offender.

Not even a strong national offender registry would discourage recidivism. Notifying the neighbors that an ex-con is in their community only ensures that he will be pulled out of mainstream society and pushed back into crime.

As soon as the word gets around, he undoubtedly will lose his job, be evicted from his apartment, and be shunned by his friends and neighbors. Then he will move to somebody else's city or town.

Some states have sought to put distance between sex offenders and children. At least 14 states have passed laws that provide buffer zones between convicted sex offenders and places where children congregate. The problem with such laws is that children are almost everywhere, not only in schools and at bus stops but also at daycare centers, zoos, swimming pools, churches, shopping malls, and playgrounds. It is almost impossible for offenders to live in a community and not be in proximity to children.

Last month, Florida and Oklahoma passed laws requiring electronic monitors using global positioning system technology for tracking sexual predators in the community. Legislatures in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York are considering the same. Bills now being considered by Congress would require all repeat sex offenders to wear an electronic ankle bracelet for life.

In theory, electronic bracelets would help law enforcement to keep an eye on high-risk offenders who come close to places where children congregate. This approach would, in all likelihood, help prosecute sex offenders who violate the terms of their parole but would hardly prevent them from committing new offenses. Even Martha Stewart claims to have been able to dismantle her electronic monitoring bracelet. To this point, electronic monitoring has worked successfully for dissuading such low-level offenders as burglars, embezzlers, and drug offenders, not obsessed sex offenders from repeating their crimes. It would be an unmanageable task for authorities to monitor the hundreds of thousands of offenders who would wear electronic bracelets.

Recognizing that electronic monitoring, buffer zones, and registries don't work, states are seeking methods for keeping dangerous sex offenders incarcerated after they are scheduled for release. In January 2002, the Supreme Court ruled that dangerous inmates could be held indefinitely but only if they are proven to lack the capacity for controlling sexually harmful behavior; that is, they must suffer from a mental disorder.

The problem with this approach is twofold: First, many sexual predators have character disorders, not serious mental illnesses. They choose to do the wrong thing because they enjoy it and so are ineligible for indefinite incarceration. Second, psychiatrists and psychologists working for the state must decide who deserves continued incarceration, but they are generally less than effective at predicting dangerous behavior.

There is really only one way for the criminal justice system to protect our children from sexual predators: Give dangerous repeat offenders the life sentences they deserve. A first-time perpetrator probably merits a second

chance. He serves a finite sentence behind bars and then resumes his life in the community. Hopefully, he has learned his lesson. But a repeat offender has proven that he cannot be trusted with our children.

The rule for habitual rapists and child molesters should be: Commit two strikes and you're never out again.

FOCUS

✧ Suggestions for Further Reading ✧

In the introduction to this section, I discussed the work of French sociologist Émile Durkheim. The frequency with which he appears in this small book should suggest just how much the work of Durkheim has influenced the direction of sociology. Durkheim's views of crime are found in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1966).

Concerning "Is the Death Penalty Only a Vehicle for Revenge?" my argument relies on numerous studies by criminologists, most of whom find little or no support for the death penalty. For a major study of capital punishment, read William J. Bowers's book *Executions in America* (1974). A much more recent argument against the death penalty can be found in Jeffrey Fagan's 2005 testimony to a New York State Assembly Committee.

Dane Archer and Rosemary Gartner, in their important book titled *Violence and Crime in Cross-National Perspective* (1984), provide cross-national evidence. They found a reduction in homicide for most of the countries in which the death penalty was abolished. For a summary of the religious arguments, read Gardner Hanks's *Against the Death Penalty* (1997). And just in case you are interested in examining the views of a criminologist who sees both sides of the issue, take a look at L. Kay Gillespie's (2003) *Inside the Death Chamber: Exploring Executions*.

My snapshot about the death penalty takes a controversial position. I first raised the issue of value-free sociology in the introduction to this book; it should come as no surprise to see it again—especially in discussing how to deal with crime. In 1918, Max Weber gave a lecture at Munich University concerning the importance of value-free sociology.

You can find his speech reprinted in *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (1946). For a different point of view regarding the place of values in sociological analysis, read "Whose Side Are We On?" by Howard S. Becker in *Social Problems* (1967). Becker argues that sociological research is always biased, never value free; in fact, every sociologist has a responsibility to take sides in support of important values and concerns.

For a perspective on and an interesting examination of the sociology of animals, read Arnold Arluke and Clinton R. Sanders's award-winning book *Regarding Animals* (1996). The sadism in many crimes against animals may be the link to similar acts of violence committed against humans. See Arnold

Arluke, Jack Levin, Carter Luke, and Frank Ascione's "The Relationship of Animal Abuse to Violence and Other Forms of Antisocial Behavior" in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (1999).

Two books also seem especially relevant to the topic. First, Jack Katz examines the subjective experiences of doing crime in his fascinating book *Seductions of Crime: Moral and Sensual Attractions of Doing Evil* (1988). He looks beyond the practical and senseless motivational veneer of criminal behavior and focuses instead on its moral and sensual rewards. For a controversial and important explanation for criminal behavior, read Michael Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi's *A General Theory of Crime* (1990). Gottfredson and Hirschi present evidence for the position that an essential element in criminality is an absence of self-control, usually learned early in life. This is a factor that may very well be present in crimes against both animals and humans. For a discussion of animal abuse as a symptom of violence-proneness in serial killers and mass murderers, read Jack Levin and James A. Fox, *Mass Murder: America's Growing Menace* (1991).

In "America's Youngsters Are Responsible for Church Burnings," the blame for a rash of church burnings that occurred during the 1990s—especially arsons against black churches—is placed squarely on our youths. From the beginning, it appeared that many, if not most, were committed by teenagers who got a thrill out of causing trouble for the members of another racial group. Only in a few cases were organized hate groups involved. This finding is true of hate crimes in general, most of which are committed by teenagers who go out in a group to vandalize, bash, or assault people who are different. For a typology of hate crimes from which my analysis of church burnings was derived, see Jack Levin and Jack McDevitt, *Hate Crimes Revisited: America's War on Those Who Are Different* (2002).

Throughout this section, we have emphasized criminal behavior as a form of deviance. In closing this section, let me point out, once again, that crime is only one form of deviance and that deviance is actually a much broader concept. Many sociologists who specialize in deviance aren't primarily interested in crime at all and instead study various forms of deviant behavior, such as mental illness or physical disability.

In "Fat Chance in a Slim World," we are also told that, throughout history, people who would be considered overweight by Americans in the 1990s were instead respected, admired, and regarded as attractive. Rather than the epitome of feminine beauty, even Cleopatra of ancient Egypt was fat by our standards! In contrast, Americans who are overweight by conventional standards are stigmatized. Specifically, they are treated as lacking in moral fiber and character. As more food for thought about this topic, pick up Kim Chernin's

interesting book *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness* (1981). She suggests that women's acceptance of society's increasing demand for females to be thin reflects cultural pressure for women to dislike their bodies. For Chernin, rigid dieting and boyish fashions are forms of rejection of feminine power and equality. My snapshot depends a good deal on Chernin and on Marcia Millman's excellent sociological treatise about being fat in America, *Such a Pretty Face* (1980). I benefited greatly from Kathleen Lebesco's 2004 *Revolt of the Bodies?: The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*.

For the classic sociological treatment of the presentation of spoiled self, see Erving Goffman's *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963). While reading Goffman, think about the influence that being fat or skinny or very short or very tall can have on a child's self-image.

Goffman has also written extensively about mental hospitals. His book titled *Asylums* (1958) is a classic in the field. David Rosenhan's excellent study of normal people gaining entrance into a mental hospital and then asking to be discharged is reported in his 1973 article "On Being Sane in Insane Places," which appeared in *Science*. For an excellent discussion of the social conditions implicated in mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety, read *Social Causes of Psychological Distress* (1989) written by John Mirowsky and Catherine Ross.

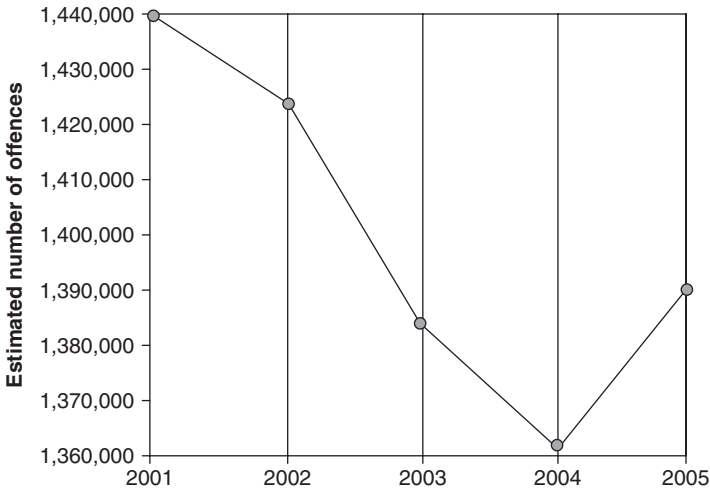
Megan's Law, which gave legal sanction to sex offender registries, was based not on research conducted by criminologists but on the emotional activism of well-meaning grieving parents who wanted to implement a policy for ensuring that other children would not be victimized by sexual predators. In "Keeping Children Safe From Sex Crimes," I argue that Megan's law and other tactics in the community approach to sexual predators simply do not work and may even reduce the safety of our children.

DEVELOPING IDEAS

✧ About Deviance ✧

1. Writing topic: Max Weber urged sociologists to attempt to be objective, even when their personal views were being contradicted. Gun control is a controversial issue—there are many proponents on both sides. In writing, state your own personal opinion—either for or against the restriction of firearms as a national policy. Then, in a short essay, defend the point of view that opposes your own.

Keeping Children Safe From Sex Crimes 141



Violent Crime Offense Figure Five-Year Trend, 2001–2005

2. Research topic: Every year, the U.S. Department of Justice publishes the Uniform Crime Reports for the United States. In *Crime in the United States*, you will find a number of different statistics concerning the serious crimes reported to the FBI by local police departments. This book is easily available in libraries, from the U.S. Government Printing Office, or online at www.FBI.gov. As taken from the FBI data, the 5-year trend in violent crime is shown in the figure above.

Using *Crime in the United States* for a recent year, find monthly variations in murder and verify that murder rates peak during July, August, and December. Now, do the same for property crimes such as larceny, theft, and burglary. Do these offenses also peak during the relatively cold month of December? Why or why not? Explain how the social climate may have more influence than the weather on monthly variations in homicide. Do you think that the social climate has the same effect on property crimes?

3. Research topic: Based on public opinion surveys, we know that most Americans favor the death penalty. But we also know that support for capital punishment decreases if people see an alternative that protects society just as well. For example, in a survey of Massachusetts citizens, William J. Bowers found that 54% prefer life without parole over the death penalty. Now, it's your turn. In a paper-and-pencil questionnaire, ask 20 students to indicate whether they support or oppose capital punishment. Now, also ask the supporters of the death penalty to indicate whether they would support or oppose it under the following conditions: (a) if life imprisonment were the only

142 Deviance

alternative sentence available; (b) if life imprisonment without parole eligibility were the only alternative sentence available; (c) if life without hope—that is, life imprisonment without parole eligibility, pardon, or commutation of sentence—were the only alternative available; or (d) if life imprisonment without parole eligibility plus victim restitution were the only alternative sentence available.

What do your results indicate about protection of society as a motivation for supporting the death penalty?

4. Research topic: With your instructor's assistance, commit an act of deviance to see how others respond to you. Select an act that is neither illegal nor unethical. Also, make sure that your deviant behavior will not affect the way you are treated by others on a permanent basis! Because it isn't always so easy to think of a safe act of deviance, let me suggest one.

Simply mark your forehead with a meaningless symbol—for example, two blue and red circles. Then, walk on campus and observe the reactions (or lack of reactions). Do strangers and friends respond differently to you? Finally, try the same experiment, but this time walk on campus with two other students whose foreheads have been painted like yours. Do you notice a difference in the way you are treated? What do you think people assume when they encounter three students wearing the same unknown symbol?

5. Research topic: Interview an individual who seems to be stigmatized because of his or her appearance (someone considered fat, short, tall, unattractive, and so on). In your interview, try to determine at what age your respondent first remembers being different. Have your respondent indicate the specific ways in which he or she has been discriminated against—at work, on dates, at school. Also try to discover how he or she manages the stigma (denial or avoidance?). Note: Please be careful not to approach a stigmatized person in a hurtful or an insensitive way. You might want to place an ad in your college newspaper asking for volunteers who have been labeled as too short, too tall, or too fat. Or you might invite volunteers from among your classmates. It may even be possible to locate an organization to which stigmatized people belong—for example, Little People of America or the NAAFA. In any case, it is obviously important to use extreme sensitivity in locating a potential respondent.
6. Writing topic: Name a group in American society, other than fat people, whose members have been stigmatized. How do you think they would be treated in some other culture? Why?
7. Research topic: Walk around for one day as a fat person to see how other people treat you. With the help of a friend, put on more than a few pounds—literally put on weight by wearing large clothing and padding yourself in a realistic way. Then, take written notes as to any differences you detect in the reactions of others.