

SOCIOLOGY 2240
DEVIANCE AND CONFORMITY
(WINTER 2008)

Grande Prairie Regional College

Course Description:

A study of the politics and social ramifications of conformity, deviance, and their relation to social change. The course examines how and why some behaviour patterns are defined as deviant or conformist.

Instructor: Alan Segal

Office: C410; 539-2011; asegal@gprc.ab.ca

1. Office Hours: Mondays: 14.30 – 15.30; 17 – 17.30; Tuesdays 7 Thursdays: 13.00 – 14.00, 17 – 17.30
Or By appointment

GOALS:

1. To understand how sociological concepts may help us analyze and comprehend our inclination to define and classify people and their behaviour.
2. To develop analytical and critical thinking skills through discussions of issues relevant to conformity.
3. To become aware of historical and contemporary attitudes, practices, and values relevant to concepts of deviance and conformity, and to their applications.

Course Prerequisite: SOCIOLOGY 1000

Required Reading:

Constructions of Deviance: Social Power, Context, and Interaction, Fourth Edition - Patricia and Peter Adler, Editors
Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices - Stuart Hall, Editor

Assignments:

Photo Project:. (F, D- to A+)

This assignment requires you to submit a photographic portfolio of at least 10 photos of Grande Prairie or its region. The pictures will convey an idea, an impression, and a provocation around the meaning(s) of your portfolio. Along with the portfolio the assignment must include an explanatory essay of at least 1200 words. The essay will explain and discuss your interpretation of your portfolio. Additional research may be drawn in but is not required. However, you must use pertinent concepts available to you in the **Representations...** book, especially the chapter that explores the cultural significance of photography. If you hand in the assignment before the due date, I will comment fully on your essay, or on your project, and you will have the option of rewriting the paper. Otherwise, I will provide a general comment at the end of your papers or projects. Grammar is important to communicating precise meaning. Grammar will not be valued as highly as content, but it will be evaluated and has the capacity to adversely affect your standing in the course. **Due Date:** First Class of March. A penalty for lateness will assessed. One letter grade per calendar day will be deducted. Insufficient length will also affect your mark, by one letter grade.

Museum Presentation: (F< D- to A+)

This will be a group presentation and the mark will be assigned collectively. You will consider yourselves curators of a new museum exhibition. The topic of the exhibit is entirely your choice, but you will bring items/objects to class and set up an exhibit. In doing so you will think about the presentation and sequence(s) of the items included. There must be a minimum of 12 items displayed. As a group you will explain to the class the significance and meaning(s) of your exhibit, and the logic of its display-sequence. Ideas from the **Representation....** book must be explicitly utilized.

Afterward, there will a break of some minutes and you will rearrange the same items/objects. Your group will then present along the same lines, a completely different interpretation of the exhibit, and again discuss with the class the logic of the display-sequence. Each presentation should be approximately 40 minutes.

Presentation Dates: Sometime in April.

Two Journals: (F, C+ to B)

Each journal is to be at least 300 words. Anything pertaining to deviance and conformity, ideas introduced in class discussions or lectures, class interaction, personal experience, etc., is suitable. Observations about, and suggestions for, the course are also suitable. No research is necessary or expected. The journals are an informal type of communication with me. **Due Dates:** February 26th and March 25th. For every 2 calendar days of lateness, your mark will be reduced by one letter grade. You also must observe the minimum length.

Discussion Bonus: Class discussion is a vital aspect of this course. Everyone may (but not necessarily will) receive a bonus mark for the QUALITY of your class discussion, based on a combination of the frequency and quality of the participation. You will be eligible only if you display commitment to the course by doing your reading and completing the required assignments, **and if you have not missed more than 3 classes during the term.** The bonus system will be assessed using an A to D system, without pluses or minuses. Blackboard discussions will be considered for the bonus grade.

Tabulating Grades:

The total GPA available from your assignments is 17. Your GPA based on your marks will be totalled and divided by this number. A percentage will be derived based on this tabulation, and the percentage will be reconverted to a final grade.

NOTE: (1) No class averaging will be done. (2) All marks will appear on Blackboard. If you are unfamiliar with this system, employees of the library will instruct you for access. You are responsible for monitoring your grade input, and informing me that a mark has not appeared for which you deserve credit.

DISCUSSION SEQUENCE

1. Introduction to course: General, Sociological, and Historical

Class Discussion: General perceptions of deviance and conformity: What behaviours do you consider deviant? Do you react to these similarly to how you respond to conforming behaviour? Do you rank deviant behaviours in a hierarchy of ascending 'transgressiveness', and if so, based on what criteria? Should sociologists contemplate such a hierarchy?

2. Hall: Introduction; Adler: General Introduction, Part 1 Intro, Chapters 1 - 3

Class Discussion: What is Hall attempting to articulate in his opening comments on language, meaning, discourse, culture, and representation? Why are these important? What is the relationship, mentioned by Erickson, of social institutions to deviance? Why speak of deviance in relation to middle class norms? Do you subscribe to the logic of the middle class norms as they outlined here? Assuming there is a middle class ethos, can you say whether conformity

and deviance are considered equally as sources of social benefits or problems? What, so far in your reading of this book, might count as a social problem? In this discussion, and throughout the course, you should contemplate this question. Does the term 'Positive Deviance' strike you as ironic or perplexing? What is positive deviance?

3. Hall: Chapter 1

Class Discussion: Outline Hall's opening explanations of language, signs, codes, and myth. Prepare to discuss the theories of representation, Reading A, and Saussure's ideas of signification. What is meant by semiotics? Why entitle its section in the book, 'From language to culture'? Prepare to discuss in groups Activities 5 & 6. What is Barthes' intent in differentiating between connotation and denotation? How does Foucault link power, discourse, truth, knowledge, and what he calls the subject? What do you think he meant by power/knowledge? Explain the final sentences of the first paragraph in 4.3. What does Hall intend to communicate when he calls section 4.1 'From language to discourse'? Prepare to discuss Activity 8 in groups.

4. Adler: Part 2 Introduction, Chapters 4 - 10

Class Discussion: Prepare to discuss the theories of deviance. Does our constant effort to control deviance suggest rationality or irrationality in our understanding of human experience? What practices do you perceive in society, that could be placed in the various theoretical sets? Does any theory strike you as being more explanatory than the others? What accounts for this - better reasoned, more encompassing, more politically astute, etc.?

5. Lecture on Ian Hacking's views of constructing social categories of people; Hall: Chapter 2

Class Discussion: What is a paradigm? How does it apply to culture, norms, and what is its relevance to discussion of deviance? Explain the use of 'paradigm' in looking at French society. Are you persuaded that photos convey and embody social paradigms, as is suggested in this chapter? Prepare to discuss Activity 3. Does Grande Prairie, or whatever community you have lived in, have events that resembles the *fetes populaire*? What observations do you have regarding urban/rural space in this city? Why mention humanism in this chapter?

6. Adler: Part 3 Introduction, Chapters 11-13, Part 4 Introduction, Chapters 14-16

Class Discussion: What assumptions of deviance and research are evident in chapters 11-13 in the Adlers' book? What value is contributed to our knowledge of deviance by the concept of the moral entrepreneur? What is a moral entrepreneur? Is this concept applied well and appropriately to drugs, smoking, and sexuality? What is meant in chapter 15 by status politics? Explain its relevance to this section of readings.

7. Hall: Chapter 3

Class Discussion: What is referred to in the phrase 'poetics and politics of exhibiting'? What implications does it have for our understanding of representation? How might such an understanding be relevant or not to our analysis of deviance? Prepare to discuss in groups the reference to, and the particulars of, Reading B, which is first alluded to on page 163. Especially consider the last sentence of the 'Reading B' reference on that page. How might the ideas pertinent to decoding texts, help you to prepare your museum presentations? Do you think the concepts of material culture would assist you in this as well? Why or why not?

8. Adler: Chapters 17-19; Part 5 Introduction; Chapters 20 - 22

Class Discussion: What questions of context are raised by the Adlers? Why cite differential social power? Do the examples in these chapters support the concept? Can you think of other examples? Can you think of contexts that are more indicative of differential social power than the ones given voice in chapters 17-19? How might the Adlers explain identity to us? In what sense can an identity be deviant? Before reading chapter 20, would you have

considered words like 'adoption' and 'management' in your thoughts about identity? Do they advance our understanding of what identity can encompass? Do bisexuality, body weight, and self-image serve well as foundations of personal identity? What about these as foundations of social identity? Do self-concept and identity refer to the same criteria of personal existence? What are primary and secondary deviance?

9. Hall: Chapter 4

Class Discussion: How does identity intertwine with Stuart Hall's discussion of the spectacle of the 'other' in chapter 4? Why is this a form of spectacle? Is race critical to 'otherness'? Were we somehow to abolish race as a context of difference, would we simultaneously abolish stereotyping? Is establishment of the 'other' mainly an outcome of stereotypes? What does Hall have in mind when he refers to fetishism and disavowal? How do stereotypes, power, and fetishism work together? How would you explain each of them? What is commodity racism? Prepare to discuss Activities 1, 2 and 5. Why does Hall mention Jacques Derrida in his look at difference? Which of Derrida's ideas contribute, in Hall's analysis, to a greater understanding of difference, demeaning categorization, and spectacle? Explain how stereotyping becomes a signifying practice. How do power and fantasy intersect?

10. Adler: Parts 6 & 7 Introductions, Chapters 23 - 28

Class Discussion: Does the disavowal mentioned by Hall have anything to do with stigma management? What is stigma management? Is it the same as a vocabulary of motive? Do you interpret the examples of stigmatization presented in Adlers' book, as they do? Would you delete any from the list? In what ways do they diverge from or move toward each other? Are some of the examples more profound for you than others? If so, why?

11. Hall: Chapter 5

Class Discussion: How crucial is the word 'exhibiting' to analyzing masculinity? Is this exhibition similar to the spectacle discussed in an earlier chapter? What is meant by techniques of the self? Can this be linked to stigma management? What does Sean Nixon mean by "sites of representation" and "consumption and the new man"?

12. Adler: Part 8 Introduction, Chapters 29 - 32

Class Discussion: If the Adlers were discussing masculinity and how it is organized through and in social life, do you think they would compare it to the social mechanisms that establish deviance? How do the illustrations of deviance in chapters 29-32 stand up to scrutiny? For example, what is the logic of risk as outlined in chapter 3? Is it generalizable to other considerations we have taken up in this course? If you were compelled to rank each chapter as exemplars of deviance, would you think they well?

13. Hall: Chapter 6

Class Discussion: What is the genre of gender? What is meant by genre as text [page 355]? What is the fiction of everyday life? What does Gledhill want to say when she writes that the social world enters fictional discourse. How can culture be gendered? Would you have conceived of the soap opera as a part of hegemony? Is the soap opera genre still mainly a woman's viewing interest? Work on Activities 1, 3, and 4.

14. Adler: Part 9 Introduction, Chapters 33 - 36

Class Discussion: In what manner do cruising for sex, manufacturing fantasy, medical crime and fraternity rape indicate a structure of deviant acts. How would Hacking respond to these representations?

15. Adler: Part 10 Introduction, Chapters 37 - 39

Class Discussion: Do the Adlers make a case, through their selection of articles, that there is a structured means of

entering and departing deviance? Speculate thoughtfully about what these chapters tell us about our society, its social margins, its rewards and penalties, etc.?