



The Original Blue Man (and Woman) Group

Over six generations ago, Martin Fugate and his bride settled on the banks of eastern Kentucky's Troublesome Creek. They had children, who had children, who had children. Most of them were healthy and lived well into old age. When Martin Fugate's great-great-great-great-grandson was born, he was as healthy as a newborn could be. He did, however, have one curious trait: dark blue skin, the color of a ripe plum or dark denim blue jeans. The attending physicians were concerned. Did the child have a blood disorder? The child's grandmother told them not to worry. Many of the Fugates had blue skin (Trost, 1982).

A young hematologist from the University of Kentucky was curious about the unusual skin color. With the help of a nurse and a blue couple, the physician eventually uncovered the reason for the blue tint. It was caused by a hereditary condition that allowed too much methemoglobin (a form of hemoglobin that is blue) to accumulate in the blood. The blue people, it seemed, lacked an enzyme that is necessary for the regulation of methemoglobin. Due either to a quirk of fate or an affair of the heart, Martin Fugate had married a woman who carried the same recessive gene for blueness that he did. Because members of the Fugate line were content to remain where they were born, people with the recessive gene that caused the blueness often married and had children with others who had the same hereditary trait. As a result, the number of blue people around eastern Kentucky's Troublesome Creek increased.

The physician and the nurse had more than an academic interest in the blue skin color. As befitted their medical training, they were really hoping to find a "cure" for it. Once they knew the reason for the skin color, it was easy enough for them to find an "antidote." Methylene blue is a chemical that changes the color of methemoglobin. When it was injected into the blue people, it had the desired effect: Their skin turned pink. However, because the effects of methylene blue are short-lived, the *former* blue people of Kentucky would have to take a pill every day for the transformation to last. (Physicians no longer see this blood condition very much because mountain people are more inclined than they once were to leave the mountains, so the gene pool is more diverse.) What could show the relative nature of deviance better than the fact that people can be stigmatized for characteristics over which

they have little or no control? If being blue among a bunch of other blue people can be labeled as deviant and in need of cure, then anything can be.

Being and Doing

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An individual's identity contains two separable parts (Goffman, 1971). One part is *social identity*, which consists of general social statuses, such as gender, race, class, and nativity. The other part is *personal identity*, which is more idiosyncratic and requires familiarity with an individual for it to be known. It includes an individual's name and appearance, as well as distinctive attributes, traits, or marks. These two identities, of course, complement one another, and social identity is always "fleshed out" by personal identity. Although being a "mother" is part of social identity, each mother has unique characteristics that make up her personal identity (e.g., *this mom likes to mow the lawn and jog 5 miles a day*). Some relationships involve interactants who know one another personally and know that they are known in both their social and personal identities. Other relationships, however, are more impersonal, involving interactants who know one another only in terms of social identity. We all have access to many identities, both social and personal, that we can present to others (Shanahan, Bauldry, Roberts, Macmillan, & Russo, 2014).

An individual may do all he or she can to keep a deeply discrediting trait hidden entirely or restricted to personal identity alone so that only a few others will be aware of it (Ridolfo & Ward, 2013). In fact, it may be a central part of one's life to keep discrediting parts of personal identity from contaminating social identity (or vice versa) (Husain & Kelly, 2017; Schroeder & Mowen, 2014). Some of what we are we embrace willingly and fully, while other parts we take on reluctantly, as something imposed on us against our wills. The human body is both a possession and a prison, being liberating and flexible in some ways but restrictive and difficult to change in other ways (Burke & Stets, 2009; Kosut & Moore, 2010; Lizardo & Collett, 2013; MacKinnon & Heise, 2010; Richardson, 2010; Thompson & Thompson, 2014).

A study in Los Angeles showed how former members of Chicano gangs present themselves to show others that they have left their gang lives behind. These ex-gang members demonstrated their exit from gang life by abandoning the indicators of gang embodiment that they had once enthusiastically embraced: shaved heads, baggy clothes, and gang tattoos. These men did what they could to change or modify their bodies and bodily presentations while still giving off signs of masculinity that focused on their new roles as "men of God" or as "family men." It was

important to these former gang members, who were generally viewed as “tough guys,” that they not be viewed as “sissies” or “unmanly” (Flores, 2016).

The experiences of people who are treated as deviant for what they *are*—their shame, guilt, or rejection by others—may not be appreciably different from the experiences of people who are treated as deviant for what they *do*. Both human behaviors and human beings must be part of our understanding of deviance, because deviance is sometimes a matter of being rather than doing (Sagarin, 1975).

The belief that one is a certain thing, particularly when the concept of isness carries with it a sense of destiny . . . creates a feeling of immutability in that role. The language reinforces both the identity and the immutability, and the role occupant at that point finds it impossible to believe that he can be or is other than what he has defined himself as being. (Sagarin, 1975, p. 152)

Role engulfment can occur in which an individual feels trapped in some particular role and powerless to leave it (Schur, 1971). Others may think this person is *only* what he or she is believed to be. We sometimes do feel imprisoned by our bodies rather than liberated, and we are imbued with all kinds of meanings and traits, coming from both the self and others (Etorre, 2010; Fiske, 2012; Moore & Kosut, 2010). Human bodies are socialized to meet the demands of the societies and groups within which they live, which can make it difficult to move someplace else and to adjust to new situations (Brown, 2017).

The English colonized Ireland, claiming it as part of the British Empire in 1494. The English were sure that Irish Catholics were far beneath them in every way possible, and so they enforced a strict separation between the two groups. The Irish were forbidden to vote, to move freely, to live in incorporated towns, to buy or inherit land from Protestants, or to marry outside their group. The Irish Potato Famine of the nineteenth century forced large numbers of Irish to leave their homeland, and some of them migrated to the United States. As had been true in England, some people in the United States viewed the Irish as a separate and naturally inferior race of beings, having more in common with other despised groups (e.g., blacks) than with whites. The Irish decided that to improve their situation, they must scapegoat and harass people worse off than themselves, while emphasizing their similarities with whites. For example, they built a political power base in large northern cities (e.g., Boston, New York, and Chicago), as well as became active in labor unions, which used to prohibit African Americans from joining. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Irish Catholics in America had come a long way toward defining themselves—as well as being defined by most others—as part of the white race. Other groups that had at one time also been viewed as nonwhite

and inferior have also successfully integrated and are now, despite the fact that they do not have light skin, defined as “white”: Italians, Jews, Greeks, and some Latin Americans (Ignatiev, 1995). Even something that seems as concrete and immutable as race or ethnicity is in fact not.

Deviance and Responsibility

Attaching Blame

The *fundamental attribution error* (FAE) is the mistake of attaching responsibility for some happening to an individual (or individuals) rather than to the social situation within which it occurs; it is the error of giving too much responsibility to individual disposition and not enough to environmental or contextual factors (Nisbett & Ross, 1991; O'Brien, 2006). In one experiment, observers were asked to view two teams of equally talented basketball players. One team was playing in a gymnasium that had plenty of light, and the second team was playing in a poorly lit gym (and doing far worse at making baskets). The observers were asked to rate the players, and they decided that the players in the brighter gym were better (Gladwell, 2000). They confused context with character, deciding that it was players' *character traits* that explained what happened rather than an obvious and important difference in environmental conditions.

Although we should never miss the role played by individual factors in what humans are, we must also be fully aware of the power of context. We will find, more often than not, that what we do and are, as well as how what we do and are is evaluated, reflects context more than anything else. We may be more fun at parties—and viewed that way by others—precisely because parties *are* fun. If we found ourselves in a bar fight, however, all this would change. We wouldn't be fun people at all (nor would we be viewed that way by others).

In June of 1867, the first Westerner visited Tahiti, Captain Sam Wallis, from England. To ingratiate himself with his hosts, he gave them gifts, some of which were iron tools. The Tahitians quickly learned how valuable they were for carving, chopping, cutting, and pounding. They wanted more of the sailors' iron implements for themselves. What might the islanders have that would be of value to these men of the sea after their very long voyage on an all-male ship? Tahitian men decided that it would be worth the trade to send their wives, daughters, sisters—in fact, any female would do—to Wallis's ship to offer up both their bodies and their sexual favors to the sailors in exchange for knives, hatchets, axes, nails, or any other pieces of iron that they had. Although these were previously sexually restrained Polynesian girls and women, their sexuality and identities over time were transformed in the interest of procuring steel and according to the interests of men. Years later, another ship with a different captain (Captain Cook)

visited Tahiti. The women they met were so uninhibited that these sailors were tempted to take apart their life boats in order to remove the nails to trade to the women for sexual access (Howe, 1984). Tahitian women changed to become more promiscuous, it is true, but the reason is found in social context and the nature of the relationships it makes possible. It was actually the philandering English and their surplus of iron that made the difference.

The attribution of responsibility is strongly influenced by whether deviance is considered to be ascribed or achieved. *Ascribed deviance* is attached by others to someone who is viewed as having a physical or visible impairment, and the individual can acquire that status regardless of his or her behaviors or wishes. By contrast, *achieved deviance* involves some intentional or deliberate activity on the part of a rule breaker. Ascribed deviance would cover the situation of individuals who are rejected for physical disabilities, and achieved deviance would cover embezzlers or bank robbers. Unlike the ascribed, the achieved have had to acquire rule-breaking status, at least to some extent, on the strength of what they do (Mankoff, 1976, pp. 241–242).

If deviance is ascribed, it is more likely to be viewed as a misfortune—devalued perhaps, but not in the same category as achieved deviance. With achieved deviance, because something has indeed been done, negative reactions are more likely to be warranted and are easier to justify. It practically goes without saying that *behavior* that breaks rules or violates expectations will regularly be viewed as achieved, and *conditions* or *attributes* that break rules or violate expectations are more likely to be viewed as ascribed (e.g., the situation of my father and his left-handedness, from Chapter 1). It is also possible for individuals to fall somewhere in between, displaying something that is perceived to be voluntary, but still what one *is* rather than what one *does* (Sagarin, 1975). An individual who is hard of hearing but who refuses to get a hearing aid falls into this category (Mauldin, 2016). Because the individual could hear better by purchasing a hearing aid but chooses not to get one, he or she is perceived to be “deaf by choice.” The deviancy of deafness exists not because the individual is hard of hearing, but because he or she is defined by others as being able to do something to hear better but choosing not to. It is generally true, however, that “isness” is less blameworthy than “didness.”

Some individuals get labeled as deviant and negatively sanctioned because they are viewed by others as a bothersome annoyance. In Irwin's (1985) words, they are *rabble*. If rabble keep to themselves and cause nobody any trouble, they are given little attention. However, if they take their annoying traits or conduct to places where they do not belong—or are defined as not belonging by influential or powerful individuals—police will usually be called to return them to places where rabble are more likely to be accepted or to cart them off to jail (Fitzpatrick & Myrstol, 2011; Huey, 2012; Way & Patten, 2013). It is not their inherent dangerousness but their offensiveness

to standards of decency and propriety that mobilizes the forces of social control against them. Dominant groups are most likely to act to control minority groups (i.e., race/ethnicity) when they are viewed as a threat (Chiricos, Stupi, Stults, & Gertz, 2014; Olzak & Shanahan, 2014).

One way that African American youths (at least in Chicago) try to keep police from stopping and frisking them is to offer a public display that shows they are nonthreatening and safe. To do this, they “get cover,” which means they show patrol officers that they are peaceful, sensitive, and caring by exaggerating (or even faking) romantic relationships with women when these youths are in public. This display is designed to challenge officers’ assessments that the youths are tough and violent. It is the management of impressions to convince police that these teenagers are innocent of any criminal potential because they are successfully engaging in responsible relationships (Stuart & Benezra, 2018). Police on patrol stop and question citizens whom they perceive to be up to no good, which is affected by suspects’ overall demeanors and presentations of self (Ishoy & Dabney, 2018).

When it comes to issues of deviance and responsibility, cause and blame are sometimes confused, but they are not the same (Felson, 1991). *Cause* is objective and verifiable, referring to observed patterns of association and ordering. If drinking alcohol causes poor driving ability, it is because the drinking precedes erratic driving and is responsible for it. *Blame* (or the assessment of responsibility) is a value-laden term, more of a moralistic judgment than a scientific determination based on logic and observation. If an individual had been in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, and was killed in the terrorist attack on that day, one *cause* of his or her death would have been that the individual decided to enter the building. However, the individual should not be *blamed* for what happened. Goode (2011) clarifies matters when he notes that, “[i]f I take a plane to Los Angeles and the plane crashes and I die, my taking the plane is one *cause* of my death—but I should not be *blamed* for my death” (p. 130).

No perfect correlation exists between cause and blame, and blaming someone for some trespass is different from identifying its cause. Although we may agree from our observation of changes in variables about what causes what, attaching blame is a more contentious issue. Different groups can have very different understandings about who is at fault and how much responsibility an individual should bear for some trespass (even while group members might agree on its cause). Attaching blame is a way for observers to deal with some of the upsetting consequences that deviance might have produced for them (Kappeler & Potter, 2018).

Discreditable and Discredited Deviants

According to Schur (1971), deviance is a *personally discreditable* departure from a group’s or society’s normative expectations. *Discreditable* attitudes, behaviors, or conditions could lead to social censure and stigma if

they ever reach the light of day, so they may be expressed or performed in private and in secretive ways (Goffman, 1963). They are confined to personal identity so that few, if any, people are aware of them. An example of discreditable behavior is ritualized self-injury. In the sample of 25 self-injurers studied by Adler and Adler (2009), the majority (80%) engaged in their acts of self-mutilation while they were alone, and they most frequently cut themselves, although they also burned, branded, and shocked themselves. Because the injurers could control where, when, and how the pain occurred, it replaced—at least temporarily—all the other pain in their lives, actually giving them a measure of comfort and relief. Their pain was a “warrior mark,” less an unfortunate consequence of the experience than one of its central objectives (Atkinson & Young, 2008). Their ability to endure pain was, at least to the injurers, an indicator of strong character, courage, and integrity. The immersion of self-injurers in their own private world of injury and secrecy leads to greater and greater isolation from others and, if discovered, strong pressures for them to stop the injury, which leads ultimately to greater loneliness, which is the principal reason that they began to injure themselves in the first place (Adler & Adler, 2009).

Passing as something other than a deviant requires impression management and strategic interaction to control what others learn about the deviant (Furst & Evans, 2015; Goffman, 1959, 1969). It involves information control and the manipulation of others in the interest of presenting and sustaining a fabricated self (Brune & Wilson, 2013; Lasky, Jacques, & Fisher, 2015; Shippee, 2011). The most effective concealment method for a discreditable deviant may be to avoid people who cannot be trusted to respect his or her privacy (Montebianco, 2018). A qualitative study of 73 participants in the bondage/discipline/sadism/masochism subculture (BDSM), by Stiles and Clark (2011), indicates that these sexual deviants were inclined to conceal their deviance from others whenever they could. They hid information about their sexual interests and practices, as well as about their deviant identity, when interacting with people whom they deemed likely to be both offended and judgmental. The largest portion of the sample (38%) told nobody outside of the subculture, following a strict need-to-know decision rule (“absolute concealment”). The rest told only close friends or family members. Only a small percentage (1%) was completely open about their sexual activities. The primary reasons members of this sample opted for concealment were self-protection and to protect others from information that these sexual deviants thought might be upsetting or unpleasant for them. Hostile reactions, real or imagined, may keep an already marginalized population from trying to integrate into mainstream society (Brayne, 2014).

Individuals who have been caught and labeled for their trespasses find themselves in a different situation from the discreditable. They are *discredited deviants*, and their main problem is managing tension during social

contacts with individuals who do not share their condition (Goffman, 1963). Goffman relates the case of a 16-year-old female who wrote to “Miss Lonelyhearts,” asking for advice about a “problem.” The teenager told the columnist that she would like to go out on dates like everyone else, but males won’t take her out even though she is a good dancer, wears nice clothes, and has a nice figure. The reason males won’t ask her out, according to the teen herself, is because she was born without a nose, having instead a “big hole” in the middle of her face. Her main question for the columnist is whether she should take her own life. In situations as extreme as this one, the discrediting trait is very difficult, if not impossible, to manage successfully no matter how much an individual tries.

A study by Rassin (2011) of individuals with HIV in the largest AIDS clinic in Israel shows that the division between the discredited and the discreditable falls apart in the real world. Because the demands of passing are so intense for individuals who must do it on a continual basis, *both* tension control and information control are required. Part of the reason that these HIV sufferers decided to keep their condition a secret is that the initial reaction of family members who had been told of the diagnosis was prejudicial, discriminatory, and hurtful. Even those HIV sufferers who had received a caring and compassionate response had reasons to hide their disease from most others. They feared that their families might become the target of hostility or persecution.

Responsibility and Moral Careers

McHugh (1970) identified two decision rules that observers use to attach moral responsibility or blame to individuals for their untoward attitudes, behaviors, or conditions. The first decision rule, called *conventionality*, refers to whether observers believe that the attitude, behavior, or condition “could have been otherwise,” and so was not inevitable. If, in their opinion, it was something that was freely chosen or voluntary, then it is a good candidate for consideration as something deviant instead of something accidental, coerced, or miraculous. It is the perceived inevitability of nonconventional events that makes the difference. Slipping on ice and falling, getting hurt in the process, is a different event from the standpoint of conventionality than using your body in a game of football to block an opponent. The extent of the injuries may be identical, but slipping is an accident—nonconventional—while body blocking in an athletic contest is something that is conventional (i.e., the athlete elected to do it to help win the game). McHugh’s second decision rule is *theoreticity*. It concerns whether the untoward attitude, behavior, or condition is viewed as having been intentional, unfolding according to some plan or purpose (making it “theoretic” instead of “practical” action). Individuals who deviate in a conventional and theoretic way are held responsible (i.e., blamed)

for disrupting the social order. They are expected to show that they understand the wrongfulness of their trespass. They are also expected to repair the damage they've done to the flow of social interaction and the moral understandings on which it is based.

These two rules are neat and tidy—sort of—but the real world is far more complicated. The boys still won't ask the teenager with no nose out on dates, and she anguishes over her physical condition so much that she contemplates suicide. She can take some small comfort in knowing that had she intentionally removed her own nose (when she did not have to), her situation would have been even worse. She herself would have been held entirely responsible for her plight. Even in the absence of the assessment that an individual is responsible for his or her condition, it is still possible for a great deal of hurt and unhappiness to result from being different from everyone else.

We must include in our understanding of deviance a category called *involuntary deviants*. These are individuals who are not held responsible for either their devalued traits or the social reactions based upon them (Montanino & Sagarin, 1977). They are still devalued and stigmatized, however, for conditions they are viewed as having had no responsibility in creating (Butera & Levine, 2009). In fact, people with disabilities are the target of both hate and violence because of their disabilities, and *disablism*—prejudice against people with disabilities—is a far-too-frequent fact of life for these involuntary deviants (Davis, 2014; Sherry, 2010; Wappett & Arndt, 2013). They may be incorrectly defined as disabled and therefore fractured people instead of being viewed as people with disabilities or handicaps (Cahill & Eggleston, 2005; Campbell, 2009). They are best viewed as individuals with atypical or unusual bodies (or minds) who must cope with an assortment of physical and social barriers imposed upon them, rather than as flawed or diseased beings (Bingham & Green, 2016).

Disagreements exist over whether something is conventional or theoretic, and who or what is to blame is a contentious issue (as noted previously). A child is asked by a father to carry a plate of cookies, but the child then drops it. The mother may think that her husband is at fault for expecting capabilities beyond most children; the father, however, may think the child is to blame for not paying sufficient attention to the task at hand to do it correctly. An important factor in how a deviant is judged and reacted to is whether he or she is trying to evade the norms secretly, making him or her a *cynical deviant*, or openly defying them, making him or her an *enemy deviant* (Gusfield, 1967). Other things being equal, cynical deviants, because they are not openly challenging the status quo and the moral order on which it is based, are generally easier to deal with and accept than are enemy deviants. Both the cynical and enemy deviants are different from a deviant like the cookie-dropper, who is neither intentionally resistant to, nor stubbornly defiant of, the normative system.

The Social Construction of Spoiled Identities

Appearance and the Sociocultural Matrix

Symmetry, Learning, and Relativity

Physical appearance is one of the more obvious and immediate cues that people bring to their encounters with others, a fundamental element in personal identity that impacts social identity. It is used as a signifier of other, more difficult-to-measure personal factors, and it plays an important role in patterns of social interaction and in the differential treatment that people receive. Physical attractiveness is a valued trait that is valuable for an individual who is defined as having it (Vecitis, 2011). The determination that someone is beautiful or ugly (or any gradation in between) involves selective viewing, classification, and evaluation. Beauty, just like deviance, is in the eye of the beholder, and *attentional adhesion*—the difficulty of pulling one’s attention or gaze away from a particular individual due to their physical attributes—is a documented fact (Maner, Gailliot, Rouby, & Miller, 2007). Appearance norms exist in all cultures, and violations of these norms can lead to the assessment that something deviant—or at least devalued—has occurred (Schur, 1983).

Studies have been done in which images of composite faces are constructed on a computer from individual pictures of faces. The greater the number of pictures of faces that went into the construction of the composite photo, the more average or symmetrical the composite became. So, if eight separate photos were used to make the composite, it is more symmetrical, typical, or average than if four separate photos had been used. The central finding is that the composite image constructed from 32 separate pictures of faces was ranked as more attractive than a composite made from 16, 8, or 4 (Buss, 1994). The equating of facial symmetry with beauty and asymmetry with ugliness is interesting but flawed. People use things in addition to the face to determine attractiveness (figure, health cues, character, personality, age), and we can certainly think of times when a symmetrical face would *not* be judged particularly attractive (think Darth Vader in *Star Wars* or other such villains).

Most of us suspect that the world’s “most beautiful people” have gotten that way by being more than just average. Using symmetrical to mean “average” is not the same as using it to mean “ideal” or “flawless,” and perhaps these words are closer to what is meant by beautiful. When American men and women are given the task of constructing an ideal or perfect human face, they seem to agree. The ideal or perfect female face is a very youthful one with full lips and a narrow mouth. The perfect male face (based on the responses of American female undergraduates) has large eyes, a large chin, a small nose, and prominent cheekbones. It is an open, pleasant face with rugged features (Small, 1995).

Are uniform and universal cues for beauty and ugliness to be found? Some traits—festering sores, hacking coughs, incessant sneezes, unpleasant body odors—are probably widely defined as unattractive or ugly, and they could easily repel potential mates in practically any situation. Other traits—youthfulness, vitality, sincerity, integrity, kindness, poise, intelligence, pleasantness—are likely to be viewed as attractive, and they may be used to classify people as beautiful. However, that is a far cry from the claim that objective and universal beauty cues exist that have been programmed into our biology and psychology to ensure reproductive success (Buss, 1994; Ridley, 1993). Just because people say that they find some particular qualities attractive in a mate does not necessarily mean that their fantasies are echoes of some genetic predisposition established long ago.

How beautiful or ugly a partner looks to us depends on our needs, our interests, the nature of our relationship to him or her, and—importantly—our relationship to other “hims” or “hers.” We may have an ideal image of beauty or handsomeness in our minds, but it is usually broad and alterable. Though a partner’s age and health are supposed to be important indicators of beauty or handsomeness in long-term relationships oriented toward reproduction, it may be just those relationships in which they are the least important. People do not usually divorce or separate on the grounds that their partner is too old or too sick. In fact, growing old together may enhance the quality of the relationship for both partners. It is almost certain that if we looked, we could find *both* beautiful and ugly things in every person on earth, and a trait that looks ugly at one time may look beautiful at another (and vice versa).

Learning must certainly play a big role in what and whom people find attractive, and culture must have an impact on what a group defines as beautiful or ugly that parallels or surpasses any influence of biology. Women and men want mates who are enjoyable to be around, who will make them feel special and needed, and who are accommodating and sensitive enough to be responsive to their wants and needs. In the absence of these, a partner’s youth, health, fecundity, or high social status will matter very little. What initially draws us to a relationship (attentional adhesion) may be very different from what keeps it going for the long run. The evaluation of potential mates and actual partners is a flexible, ongoing enterprise.

Beauty Norms and Cultural Dynamics

All the different body forms, skin colors, nose shapes, ear designs, and facial configurations, along with all the deliberate modifications of the human form, make it hard to believe that any universal and uniform standard of beauty and ugliness could ever be found.

A cross-cultural survey of notions of beauty is sure to include such “oddities” as a preference for cross-eyes (Mayans), flattened

heads (Kwakiutl), black gums and tongue (Maasai), black teeth (Yapese), joined eyebrows (Syrians), absence of eyebrows and eyelashes (Mongol), enormously protruding navels (Ila), pendulous breasts (Ganda), gigantic buttocks (Hottentot), fat calves (Tiv), crippled feet (Chinese), and so on. (Gregersen, 1983, p. 81)

Certainly, it is not hard to find examples that challenge the claim that standards for beauty are universal and programmed into us at birth.

The erotic potential of female genitalia is found throughout the world, but the Tswana-Kgatla (Africa) put their own spin on it:

With the onset of puberty Kgatla girls start pulling their labia and sometimes will ask a girlfriend to help. If the labia do not get longer as quickly as desired, the girls resort to magic. They kill a bat and cut off its wings, which they then burn. The ashes are ground up and mixed with fat. Each girl makes little cuts around her labia and smears the bat-ash ointment into the cuts. (Gregersen, 1983, p. 92)

This little bit of magic is designed to get the labia to grow quickly to the size of bat wings.

Teeth are an important part of one's appearance, and having a "nice" smile is usually considered an asset. The existence of "best smile" contests suggests that judges know a great smile when they see one (or believe that they do). Yet, what qualifies as a "great smile" varies across the globe. Teeth have been permanently colored, knocked out, dug out, filed down, decorated, drilled, and chipped in order to heighten their attractiveness (Gregersen, 1983). U.S. models and actresses (and others, thanks to the influence of television advertising) spend considerable time and money on the whitening of their teeth. The Nilotes of East Africa would find these efforts at whitening incomprehensible. Beauty for them involves knocking out the lower front teeth (up to six), usually at the start of adolescence (p. 97).

Standards for the "proper" girth and weight for individuals to meet are variable things, too. In places where food and a full stomach are both luxuries, corpulence is coveted, and thinness is taken as a sign of poverty or sickness, not self-control and good form (Brownmiller, 1984).

In Mexico, for example, people are significantly less concerned than U.S. citizens about their own weight and are more accepting of overweight people. In Niger, being overweight—ideally with rolls of fat, stretch marks, and a large behind—is considered an essential part of female beauty. Women who aren't sufficiently round are considered unfit for marriage. In Mauritania, girls as young as 5 and as old as 19 are sometimes forced by their parents

to drink five gallons of fat-rich camel's milk each day so they become fat. Among the Calabari people of southeastern Nigeria, soon-to-be brides are sent to farms where caretakers feed them huge amounts of food to fatten them up for the wedding day. (Newman, 2008, p. 161)

The existence of cross-cultural differences in appearance norms for body size ratifies the truth of novelist Erica Jong's (1990) Proverb Number One for Free Women: "You're not too fat; you're just in the wrong country" (p. 296). If she's right, it means that finding that one's body proportions are not only accepted, but even admired, has more to do with *where* an individual is than with the size of an individual's stomach. Obesity was not always viewed in the United States as an indication of either physical disease (e.g., glandular malfunction) or weak character, and it still is not in many places in the world even today (Ruane & Cerulo, 2015; Saguy, 2013).

Body Blame

Most adult women in the Western world have at some time in their lives been displeased to a greater or lesser extent with the shape and weight of their bodies, and they have tried to alter them in one way or another by reducing their food intake (Grogan, 2009). Studies in the United States, Australia, and Great Britain, using figural rating scales (a series of silhouettes of a body, going from very thin to very fat), indicate that respondents were inclined to find as most attractive a body shape that was thinner than their own. Slenderness and confidence are positively linked for most women, and most of them can more easily identify something wrong with their bodies than right with them. Glass, Hass, and Reither (2010) report from their research done in Wisconsin that heavy females in their sample were less inclined than lighter females to pursue postsecondary schooling, even though they were just as academically capable. Part of the reason was low self-esteem, depression, and a fear of failing. Obese women do face significant and enduring discrimination and disadvantage in their jobs because of their body size (Mason, 2012).

Individuals who view obesity as deviant are the ones who are most likely to define it as a result of individual laziness and weak will, a failure by overweight people to exercise often enough or to exert sufficient personal control over their eating habits (Guthman, 2011). Obesity is usually portrayed as an individual problem with roots in fundamentally bad choices. Social factors (e.g., class, race, gender, ethnicity, opportunity, accessibility, affordability), despite their clear role in how, what, and how much we eat, are given scant attention (Roberts & Edwards, 2010). These negative evaluators view obesity as a blemish of character, as well as of body, instead of the operation of impersonal forces over which an individual has little or no control (Goode, 2002, 2015). Overweight individuals who undergo weight

loss surgery to reduce their body mass may be stigmatized by others for the surgery itself, because it is construed to indicate that the overweight individual lacked willpower to eat less or dedication to exercise more (thus revealing laziness). The surgery was looked at by outsiders as cheating, when a stronger character is all that would have been required (Hansen & Dye, 2018).

Physical appearance cues influence how individuals are treated (McClintock, 2014). For males, being tall helps increase their earnings throughout their careers, and tall men are more desired as dating partners than are short men. Individuals with above-average appearances earn much more in their jobs during their lifetimes than do people with below-average looks (Hamermesh, 2013). Although both males and females may dislike getting old, more females than males report that they do not want to *look* old. Most women surveyed—heterosexual ones, at any rate—profess that an important factor that makes them think they look old is that they no longer receive approving looks from men (Slevin, 2010). Men also want to enhance their appearance, taking advantage of (if they can afford them) the beauty products created just for them and administered in grooming salons that cater exclusively to men (Barber, 2016).

Prominent boosters and cheerleaders for reconstructive surgery help to advance its public acceptance when they extol its benefits (as when a transgender woman, such as Caitlyn Jenner, whose birth name was Bruce Jenner, reports that she has been empowered by her facial feminization surgery). Social media (e.g., Snapchat and Instagram) make it possible for individuals to use “filters” to modify onscreen images of themselves so that they have smoother skin, fuller lips, and noses that they like better. This has led to females getting cosmetic surgery to alter their faces enough that they look like the enhanced selfies they have posted on the Internet (Jowett, 2017). The number one surgical procedure in the United States for males is a nose job; breast augmentation is the top cosmetic surgery for females (Stein, 2015). At one time in the United States, women who were interested in buttocks surgery wanted to make theirs smaller. By 2010, however, a discernible shift had occurred, and more and more women were paying to get bigger behinds, accomplished usually through butt implants (the Kim Kardashian effect) (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2017).

It is a long way from laboratory studies of symmetry and attentional adhesion to the real world of finding and uniting with a desired partner. A few things—a very few things—*might* be universally viewed as beautiful or ugly. However, what appears to be more important is the total package a person brings to a relationship (or the other’s perception of that package). Having a beautiful face—or any other specific trait—is not that important, at least not for long, or at least not in long-term relationships. Many things—opportunity, accessibility, availability, personal objectives, individual motives, physical qualities, personality characteristics, social attributes—are assessed by people as they form relationships. Humans find

a wide range of things attractive, some of which reflect cultural meanings, while others reflect more idiosyncratic preferences. No matter whom we are with or what we find attractive, most of us realize that if we'd come to a different fork in the road and taken a different path, our partners would have been different from who they are.

Status and Stigma

Each individual is a cluster of different attributes and appearance cues (in both social and personal identities), and each person displays a large number of different behaviors during the course of his or her life. We must wonder, therefore, why certain designations or characterizations are used more often than others to describe us, and why some of them stick to us more readily in describing what we are and what we do. E. C. Hughes (1945) coined the term *master status* to describe a status that evolves into the dominant way an individual is interpreted and categorized by others. A person's sex is usually a master status, as are skin color and occupation. These are major identity pegs, and they play a role in most human relationships. The status of deviant, Becker (1963) informs us, is also a master status. It can predominate over many other statuses that an individual occupies and can become a controlling one in his or her relationships to others (Pager, 2007). A deviant status, one that is publicly known and recognized, does influence how other people react, having a direct influence on how one is treated (Cohen, Krumer-Nevo, & Avieli, 2017; Furst & Evans, 2017; Turick, Darwin, & Bopp, 2018).

At one time, the word *stigma* meant a distinguishing mark or brand cut into an individual's flesh for the purpose of identifying him or her as a tainted or despised individual. Now, stigma means *any* attribute—a physical sign or character cue—that is accompanied by shame or disgrace. Too-tall Jones is identified by body, and Otis the town drunk is identified by character. Stigma can also have little directly to do with body or character: It can exist because a person is a member of a persecuted or despised group, what Goffman (1963) called *tribal stigma*. He reminds us that when speaking of stigma, what is really needed is a language of relationships rather than of attributes, because no attribute is automatically crediting or discrediting. Stigma always involves a relationship between some attribute and its perception and symbolization by others. "Normal" and "stigmatized" are not persons but *perspectives* on persons (p. 138).

A tattoo, for example, may be either a *stigma symbol* (i.e., discrediting) or a *prestige symbol* (i.e., status-enhancing), depending on who the tattooee is, what the tattoo represents, where the tattoo is placed, and the nature of the relationship between the tattooee and his or her evaluating others. A tattoo is a highly complex social symbol, being both a source of status enhancement and a source of stigma that intersects with other qualities and characteristics that an individual may have. In some cases, getting a tattoo

is a rite of passage or ceremonial event (Keagy, 2017). Tattoos have been used to identify social outcasts and to make it more difficult for them to blend in with others. In Japan in the sixth century, criminals were tattooed on the arms and face, and in the 1800s, convicts in correctional facilities in Massachusetts had “Mass S. P.” and the date of their release tattooed on their left arms (Sanders, 1996). The custom of tattooing was brought to the Western world by sailors, who had learned of the practice through their encounters with natives of New Zealand (the Maori people), as well as other tattoo-wearing natives in Hawaii, Tahiti, and Polynesia (Camacho & Brown, 2018). Tattooing of criminals for punitive reasons has been done throughout the world for a variety of reasons and to achieve a variety of objectives (retribution, degradation, or marking of an untrustworthy individual) (Jacques, 2017).

At some times and in some places, tattoos are viewed as tarnished cultural products, an indication that the tattooed individual lacks enough maturity to be able to consider the consequences of his or her actions (J. Adams, 2012). Tattoos on teenagers are still stigmatizing, indicating to the general public that the bearer is unconventional in outlooks and interests. Adolescents with tattoos are reported to be more inclined toward deviance, less academically oriented than adolescents without tattoos, and less interested in attending college (Silver, Silver, Siennick, & Farkas, 2011). A study conducted in a large county in the southern United States found that having a tattoo that was visible increased the odds (compared to an individual without a visible tattoo) of receiving a felony charge from an arresting officer by 1,293 times. The only other variable that mattered was race, with black arrestees having odds of receiving a felony charge 1,330 times greater than those of a white arrestee (Camacho & Brown, 2018, p. 1036).

Some individuals do not consider tattoos to be stigmatizing. In fact, they collect tattoos on their bodies, viewing these markings as a fundamental and attractive part of their personal and social identities. They use a tattoo to increase their feelings of self-worth and to transform their identities in the eyes of others (Goode & Vail, 2008; Sanders, 1996). In fact, for some people, one tattoo is not nearly enough (Vail, 2008). Even genital piercings, once considered abnormal and degenerate, are a body adornment that is becoming more mainstream and conventional (Thomas, Crosby, & Milford, 2015).

How tattoos are viewed, especially by those individuals inclined to view them as disreputable, cannot be separated from the tattoo industry itself. Tattoo artists have not had the same level of success as practitioners in related industries (e.g., cosmetologists, barbers, beauticians, manicurists) in changing the public image that they are engaged in what E. C. Hughes (1951) called *dirty work*. This is work that is defined as unpleasant, with clients or customers who are defined as unsavory or deplorable (J. Adams, 2012). In November 2012, Walter Smith, a self-described tattoo artist, was forbidden to share information about tattooing with students during

“Career Day” at Clearwater Fundamental Middle School (Clearwater, FL). His daughter was a student at the school, and Smith had participated in years past. The reason for the ban cited by the school principal was parental complaints that Smith would be promoting an alternative lifestyle.

Johnson Aziga left his home country (Uganda) and moved to Canada to attend the University of Guelph. In 1996, he was diagnosed with HIV but failed to tell this to his female sexual partners (and refused to use condoms). Several women complained to police (in Hamilton, Ontario) that Aziga had infected them. After a lengthy trial (in 2009), he was convicted of two counts of first-degree murder, 10 counts of aggravated sexual assault, and one count of attempted aggravated sexual assault (two women died because of him, and five others are living with HIV). In 2011, he was branded by the courts as a “dangerous offender,” a label usually reserved for Canada’s most violent criminals and sex offenders. It was the first time anywhere in the world that someone had been convicted for HIV nondisclosure.

According to Speakman (2017), Aziga’s villainy was established by claims-makers using *techniques of vilification* in which they asserted that he acted knowingly and deliberately to create great harm to others, was propelled by wicked or evil motives, and remained irresponsibly indifferent to the harm that he had caused. This was coupled with the further claim that he and he alone was responsible (i.e., no shared responsibility) and that no alternate explanation existed to explain away his villainy (e.g., insanity, ignorance, psychological problems, or social disadvantages). Similar techniques are found practically anywhere that accused deviants are degraded and excluded (Garfinkel, 1956; Lemert, 1951). (Speakman did not deal in a satisfactory way with the charge that Aziga *deserved* to be vilified for his indifference to the consequences of his predatory sexual behavior toward the women with whom he slept.)

Stigma may be an outcome of having “bad” companions or associates (or those defined as bad), a stigma by association called *courtesy stigma* (Goffman, 1963). (A daughter who is embarrassed because her father is viewed as the town drunk is suffering from this kind of stigma.) A study of stigma by association, experienced by Hollywood artists and performers during the “Red Scare” of the 1950s, illustrates how this can work. After World War II (circa 1945–1960), some powerful and influential people in Hollywood became convinced—or acted as if they were—that the film industry had been infiltrated by communists and communist sympathizers. Of the approximately 30,000 artists (31,781, to be exact) who worked in Hollywood during those years, 300 were officially blacklisted and kept from working. Practically anyone who had any connections with them, no matter how slight, also became the target of persecution. They, too, found that they had trouble finding work. One contact with a tainted individual was usually enough to have adverse consequences for an artist’s career. Even contact with a blacklisted writer proved to be a liability (Pontikes, Negro, & Rao, 2010).

Another episode in U.S. history, having many similarities with the Red Scare, can also teach us something of value about the processes of stigmatization and exclusion. It is known as the “Lavender Scare,” words used to describe the hysteria that characterized U.S. society, starting in 1950 and continuing for almost 40 years, over homosexuals in the government work force (Johnson, 2004). (In the 1950s, as now, the color lavender was commonly associated with the gay community.) In February 1950, Deputy Undersecretary John Peurifoy informed a congressional committee that many individuals had been fired from the State Department for being security risks, 91 of whom were homosexuals (or deemed to be). This claim led to a moral panic, during which outrage grew throughout the country that gays and lesbians were in so-called sensitive positions in the national workforce. Debates in Congress ensued, as did congressional investigations, news reports, and White House meetings. In 1953, then-President Eisenhower declared that homosexuals were a threat to the security of the United States and unfit to hold public office. Tens of thousands of federal employees were removed from their government jobs solely because of presumptions about their sexual orientations, usually on the flimsiest of evidence. The official reason for the purge of gays and lesbians was that their “immorality” or “degeneracy” would make them vulnerable to blackmail, proclaimed to be a huge liability for any worker who had access to sensitive information.

The way that an individual was determined to be a “homosexual” was almost always that the accused was informed that information had been obtained that he or occasionally she (most of the targeted individuals were male) was a homosexual and then asked to offer a defense to the charges. The evidence was circumstantial and highly prejudicial. (Homosexuality was against the law during this time period, as well as being widely construed as evidence of both mental illness and moral degeneracy.) Even information as insubstantial as that the accused was known to *associate with* “known homosexuals” was sufficient grounds for dismissal. Simply being arrested in an area of a city known to be a gay cruising area could have been enough for an individual to be labeled as gay and removed from his or her job (Johnson, 2004, p. 3). A central feature of the government’s efforts to ferret out gays and lesbians was the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s “sexual deviates” program (Charles, 2015). FBI agents, much like practically everybody else given the mandate to identify and remove homosexuals from their jobs, relied heavily upon guilt by association, rumor, and unconfirmed gossip. (A 2017 award-winning documentary, entitled *The Lavender Scare*, chronicles this event.)

The Red and Lavender Scares show that some individuals are accused of doing things they haven’t or of being things they aren’t. They are, in other words, *falsely accused* (Becker, 1963, p. 20). Even in a court of law, some people are tried and convicted of crimes that they did not commit—known colloquially as a “bum rap”—even though a number of safeguards exist to

make it less likely that the innocent are wrongfully convicted (Barkan & Bryjak, 2014). False accusations are more likely with individuals who have prior records, deviant friends, or poor educational performances, and with those who are male, nonwhite, and lower-class (Menard & Pollock, 2014). False accusations are even more likely to occur outside a legal setting where few, if any, safeguards exist to ensure that individuals are not accused of doing things that they did not do (Becker, 1963; Menard & Pollock, 2014). A label, even if it is false, can still have important consequences for both the labelers and the labeled individuals (Rocheleau & Chavez, 2015). It can even become a self-fulfilling prophecy, creating deviance that would otherwise not occur (Merton, 1948).

The social construction of a spoiled identity usually includes *retrospective interpretation* (Kitsuse, 1962), in which an accused deviant's biography is scrutinized, and prior experiences with the accused are played over in memory, searching for anything that might help to account for the individual's current display of deviance. The rule breaker is recast in the eyes of others, and he or she is viewed in a new way (Schafer, Ferraro, & Mustillo, 2011; Schur, 1971). What was once viewed as normal in the identity of the deviant comes to be viewed as a façade that was actually hiding a deeper, more sinister, more authentic constellation of traits and attributes (Garfinkel, 1956). Retrospective interpretation works to create order out of what seems to be disorder. It allows observers to understand better how a seemingly ordinary person could do or be something so unusual. This individual is found to not be as ordinary as originally thought; despite surface appearances, he or she actually had been flawed all along.

If something is found in the accused deviant's personal history that can explain the deviance, even remotely, it becomes part of the reconstructed biographical record. We may discover, for example, that a mass murderer had an abusive childhood and liked guns, information that would never have come to light—or been given much significance—if the individual had not committed random acts of violence. The process of retrospective interpretation is selective, and factors that might refute, challenge, or complicate the biographical sketch may be ignored, dismissed, or downgraded. It is also possible for the biographical reconstruction to include fabrications or lies. For example, a deviant's parents might be viewed as having been abusive when they really were not. All deviants may undergo processes of retrospective interpretation, especially when the need is great to explain or understand what seems to be inexplicable.

Deviants themselves may engage in an *autobiographical* retrospective interpretation as they search through their own life experiences to come to some understanding of why they can't be like everybody else or even why others are so annoyed by them. A study of 10 street prostitutes, who were in rehabilitation for their heavy drug use while trying to disengage from sex work, shows how this works. They used their former drug addictions as a way to explain and therefore handle some of the stigma associated with

prostitution. They retrospectively made sense of their own involvement in prostitution by tying their sex work and their drug abuse together, presenting them as remnants of former lives and their corresponding former selves (McCray, Wesely, & Rasche, 2011). This retrospective interpretation allowed them to move from deviant to nondeviant identities more easily. They were, in the words of Gusfield (1967), *repentant deviants*.

Managing Stigma

Deviance Avowal

Individuals are objects of their own experience, holding opinions and making evaluations of their personal attributes and social identities. Just because other people may condemn an individual for some behavior or attribute does not mean that he or she must share their opinions (LeBel, 2012; Schachter, 2016). Individuals may take pleasure and pride in what they are, precisely because other people *do* condemn it, or they may simply be indifferent to the reactions of others, marching to the beat of a different drummer (Steinmetz & Gerber, 2014). Stigma is based on negotiated understandings and situational factors, not universal and absolute decision rules (Haenfler, 2013). A study of 50 individuals who received financial compensation from their control or coordination of adult sex workers in Canada (sometimes called “pimps,” “procurers,” or “traffickers”) shows that an effective strategy is to remain blind to whatever stigma may attach to their activities. What they did was to reject, not the pimp identity, but the negative images and unflattering assessments that pimps are men or women (40 of the pimps were women or trans women; 10 were men) who force women they manage to do things against their will and not in their best interest (Hannem & Bruckert, 2017).

People with devalued attributes can still maintain a positive self-image, not only by hiding or covering the troubling condition, but also by believing that their personal condition is actually a good and valued trait regardless of what others may think. They may view their condition as righteous, requiring neither apology nor regret. In some cases, stigmatized individuals find ways to exploit their conditions for positive gains (Herman & Miall, 2005). They will transform negative labels into positive ones through a process of reinterpretation so that a once-stigmatizing label is no longer (“I’m bald *and* beautiful”). Little evidence exists that people who are defined as deviant by others *inevitably* hold poor opinions of themselves (Darling, 2013). Despite a loss in status, acquiescing to a degrading label can still bring some benefits (Beard, 2016).

A once-stigmatizing trait also may be redefined by others as something positive (or vice versa). Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, the famous character from the Christmas song, shows how this can happen. His nose,

once a source of embarrassment and shame (a stigma symbol), which kept the animal from joining in any reindeer games, became a prestige symbol because it came to be evaluated so positively by Santa Claus, majordomo of the North Pole. Women with naturally curly hair may be displeased with what sits atop their heads until style standards change and straight hair is no longer all the rage. During the Victorian era in both England and the United States, respectable women of means all carried parasols when they were outside in order to avoid any tanning of their skin. The bearer of untanned skin was viewed as attractive, because her ivory exterior showed that she did not have to toil in the fields to earn her daily bread. The meaning of suntan changed, however, and tan skin is now likely to be viewed as more attractive than untanned skin. An important reason for the reversal is that fewer of us labor in the fields, finding our work activity indoors rather than outdoors (Gregersen, 1983). This means that having a tan, especially over much of the body, indicates that the bearer has both the time and resources to be able to attain one in recreational pursuits; it is no longer necessarily a by-product of a life of toil outdoors.

Whether negative reactions from others lead to reduced feelings of self-worth depends a lot on the type of deviance, how committed the individual is to it, how involved the individual is with conventional society, the nature of the relationship between the accusers and the accused, and whether the condition is shared with others. Certain kinds of deviance are actually status enhancing, and deviants readily avow their deviance (Turner, 1972). *Deviance avowal* exists when people want to occupy a deviant status and actively pursue it if they can. Examples are a bald individual who displays his lack of hair as a source of masculinity and pride, refusing to wear a toupee or wig to hide his condition, or an ordinary individual who pretends to be a “biker” by dressing the part and getting tattooed, thereby faking unconventionality. This reminds us that some deviance can be functional, even righteous, for some individuals. In fact, nondeviants may fake or exaggerate unrespectability (Ball, 1970). Even extreme acts of deviance (e.g., murder, robbery, or drug dealing) can be consciously chosen in order to give an individual a sense of purpose, belonging, or even respect (Katz, 1988; Lindegaard & Jacques, 2014).

Kitsuse (1980) proposed the term *tertiary deviation* to cover all those situations in which deviants embrace a deviant status but reject the negative identity and stigma associated with it. This transforms a deviant identity into something that is both positive and desirable. He referred to individuals who do this successfully as the “new deviants”:

Fat people, little people, ugly people, old people, and a growing number of others—who have called into question the very concept of “deviant,” not by denying what they are, but by affirming and claiming it as a valued identity deserving of the rights accorded any member of society. (p. 8)

One thing that tertiary deviants may do is join with other devalued or deviant people to collectively fight against or resist the societal exclusion, segregation, prejudice, and discrimination to which they are subject. One positive result of such a banding together, at least for individuals with certain defined disabilities, is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), a United Nations treaty that was adopted in 2006. Its principal objective is to remove any barriers that may exist for individuals with disabilities in the areas of education, health care, and civic involvement (Sabatello & Schulze, 2014).

At one time, people with certain types of spoiled identity—they used to be called “freaks”—could find a place in the world of popular entertainment and amusement. Siamese twins, bearded ladies, tattooed men, giants, dwarfs, armless men, the obese, the extremely thin—you name them, they were there. Though some of them were exploited, most of them were performers and entertainers who were applauded for having turned a potential liability into a profitable and valuable identity peg. According to Bogdan (1988), these human exhibits had no objection to being put on display; in fact, most of them enjoyed the attention. They were comfortable with what they were, and though they were called freaks, they did not believe they were freakish.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the display of human oddities for amusement had fallen into disrepute in the United States. Part of the reason was the growing fear that these individuals might reproduce and transmit their physical traits to future generations. The major factor, however, was that after physicians organized into the American Medical Association (in 1847), they worked to establish their claim that they had special expertise and knowledge in regard to understanding and treating *all* human deviation. Human oddities, like those displayed in the freak shows, came to be medicalized as abnormal but curable rather than as exotic exhibits for the amusement of paying customers (Bogdan, 1988). The population of “people with disabilities” is a heterogeneous, ever-changing one (Bogdan, 2012; Darling, 2013).

Some attributes of individuals, though potentially discrediting, are tolerated or even accepted because they are assessed in light of other attributes of these same individuals. A different cluster of attributes would have produced very different reactions from others. Consider the following letter to “Dear Abby” from a “Happy Wife”:

Dear Abby:

When our daughter was a baby, I found her pacifier in our bed. I thought it had dropped out of her mouth while she was in our bed, but later I found the pacifier in the drawer of our nightstand table, and I couldn't for the life of me figure out how it got there.

Then one morning I woke up early and saw my husband sound asleep with the pacifier in his mouth! We had a good laugh over

it, and that evening when I fixed the baby's bottle I jokingly asked him if he wanted a bottle too. He said yes, so I fixed him one.

He loved it, so I kept fixing him a bottle right along with the baby's. I took the baby off the bottle when she was fourteen months old, but my husband still has one every night, and he is thirty-seven. Please don't use our names as my husband is well known here. He works on the space program. Thank you. (Van Buren, 1981, p. 175)

How can the husband *not* be deviant? The wife is embarrassed to have their name printed, and both she and her husband seem to realize that most other fathers are not nursing on their babies' pacifiers or drinking from their babies' bottles. Yet how can he *be* deviant? Both the wife and husband laugh over the husband's acts, and the wife really seems to experience very little consternation over her spouse's fondness for infant paraphernalia. Other characteristics in his cluster of traits (employee on the space program, good provider, good sense of humor) seem to be sufficient for his wife to be accepting of his less commendable traits.

Deviance and Respectability

People differ on what they accept or reject in others and on what they consider respectable. In November 1996, a 13-year-old female student named Karla Chapman did what she had done many times before. She went to class at Runyon Elementary School in Pike County, Kentucky. This day, however, she was declared to be a distraction by Rosa Wolfe, the principal. Three times the principal had warned her, and three times Karla Chapman had defied the principal's authority. The problem? Karla Chapman wore *black* lipstick. At another time or place, with different people, this probably would have been no big deal. However, at this time and place, with these people, it developed into a very big deal indeed.

Karla found that her choice of lipstick color (which she insisted was her business, not the school's), coupled with her refusal to wipe the stuff off as ordered, got her suspended for 3 days. On the day that her suspension ended, Karla got ready for school, donned a different-colored lipstick, and arrived at the elementary school ready for classes to start. However, she was once again reprimanded and prohibited from entering the school, because her new choice of lipstick color—dark purple—was still unacceptable to school personnel. Because the principal would brook no opposition, Karla was put in a difficult situation. If she did not return to school, she would be considered a truant—which at Karla's age qualified her as a delinquent—but if she did return to school, she could not wear lipstick that was considered distracting by the principal (Mueller, 1996).

It is difficult for an outsider to this incident to understand what it is about black lipstick that makes it so distracting and what exactly made

Karla Chapman such a problem to the principal. Certainly, nothing unique to black lipstick makes it more upsetting than any other color of lipstick. Even red lipstick could be distracting on a 13-year-old (depending, of course, on how it was applied). One wonders if the problem was not so much the black lips as the fact that a teenager would refuse to comply with orders by the principal to remove it (and thereby challenge the authority of those who have the power to decide what qualifies as a respectable appearance).

If Karla Chapman had been *born* with black lips, it is the principal who would have found herself in a difficult situation in trying to expel her. Though Karla still would have been sporting a “distracting” color, the attribute would be viewed as something over which Chapman had little or no control. The power and authority of school administrators would not have been challenged directly by a young person’s *deliberate* act of insubordination, and they could have afforded to be more gracious and understanding than they were in this particular instance. Clearly, stigma is one possible outcome of the negotiations between people about the propriety of conditions that some of them find disturbing and unnecessary.

Deviants can encounter two different types of potentially supporting or confirming others. Goffman (1963) refers to one group as *the own*—individuals who also have the deviant’s devalued trait. Although these individuals are more likely than others to be accepting of people like themselves, this is not guaranteed. Bullies don’t like other bullies very much, and hyperactive people are not automatically more accepting of people like themselves. The stigmatized may, in fact, stigmatize others. They may even try to reduce stigma and negative labeling of themselves by constructing symbolic boundaries between themselves and others, whom they brand as more abhorrent and less functional than themselves (Webb, Deitzer, & Copes, 2017). The other group is *the wise*. These are individuals who do not themselves possess the devalued trait but who are familiar enough with the plight of individuals who do to be both understanding and accepting of them. Research does suggest that the *own* and the *wise*, taken together, are inclined to be more accepting of stigmatized individuals than are “normals,” with the *own* being more accepting than those with only personal knowledge of it (i.e., the *wise*) (Markowitz & Engelman, 2017).

Neutralization and Stigma Management

An individual may find it necessary to manage or lessen whatever stigma he or she is experiencing through the use of *techniques of neutralization* (Sykes & Matza, 1957). These techniques, regardless of their specific form, are verbalizations that make it possible for individuals to temporarily suspend forces of social control, making them inoperative or insignificant (though neutralization could persist indefinitely). This makes it possible for an individual to engage in deviance without experiencing serious damage

to his or her self-concept and without feeling constrained by feelings of stigma or embarrassment. Sykes and Matza identified five techniques of neutralization:

1. *Denial of responsibility*: The deviant insists that whatever happens is not his or her fault.
2. *Denial of injury*: The deviant insists that what happened hurt nobody.
3. *Denial of victim*: The deviant insists the victim was actually the one responsible for the deviance that occurred.
4. *Condemnation of the condemners*: The deviant insists that those who are criticizing him or her have no legitimacy, and it is they who are the real deviants.
5. *Appeal to higher loyalties*: The deviant insists that what he or she did was actually for the good of the whole—the nation, the society, the community, the gang—to achieve some higher purpose.

Some deviants will deny responsibility, thereby neutralizing whatever tension they might otherwise experience; others will insist that nobody was hurt or that the victim deserved what he or she got; still others will condemn those who condemn them and portray those others as stupid, spiteful, or mean; and still others will manage tension by claiming that they march to the beat of a different drummer (i.e., appeal to higher loyalties).

These techniques can be called upon to do more than neutralize. They can also serve as vocabularies or verbalizations that *motivate* behaviors that would otherwise not occur (Mills, 1940). Neutralization techniques can also serve as *rationalizations*, coming *after* some untoward act occurs (“They had it coming, so what’s the harm?”). The use of what Hitlin (2008) calls *lawyer logic* fulfills a rationalizing function (“I did it, but they can’t prove it.”). A study of neutralizations used by employees of retail banking establishments to make their criminal activities appear more necessary and acceptable identified another technique of neutralization: *Everyone else is doing it* (so I will too) (Leasure, 2017).

The kind of deviance that occurs has a lot to do with the kind of neutralization techniques and rationalizations an individual is able to muster. Most deviants are aware that their trespasses are condemned by others and so engage in neutralizations of one form or another (Goode, 2013; Maitra, Mclean, & Deuchar, 2018). A study of “sexting” at a small liberal arts college in the northeastern United States (with a student body of 535) shows that participants in the exchange of sexually explicit words or photographs through cell phones or other electronic devices realize that sexting is deviant and that doing it could lead to unpleasant and unwanted consequences

(Renfrow & Rollo, 2014). These sexters mustered all kinds of neutralizing strategies to minimize the risks of sexting, such as emphasizing its playfulness, exaggerating its normality (“Everyone is doing it”), and stressing its benefits (e.g., a way to strengthen a romantic relationship and encourage more open communication). Sexting has been found to be associated with other risky behaviors (e.g., bullying, property crimes, alcohol use, and marijuana use) (Woodward, Evans, & Brooks, 2017).

When it comes to stigma, it may not be so much that the deviant *did* (or *was*) the wrong thing as that the deviant failed to *present* what he or she did in the most appropriate, socially acceptable way. Some people can get away with things that other people cannot, because they are skilled at managing impressions for the benefit of others. One thing that a deviant can do is perform *atonement*. This means doing the “right” thing immediately after it was done “wrongly.” I once saw a tape of a weather report in which the reporter incorrectly informed her viewing audience that “from the north came cold mares’ asses,” while pointing to a map of the United States. She paused momentarily and then said it again, the right way: “From the north came cold air masses.” Her atonement helped lessen some of the discomfort that her initial misstatement could have caused, both for the audience and for her. Another thing that deviants can do is to use an *apology* (Goffman, 1971). An apology is functional, both for the recipients and for the individual offering it. It shows that the individual realizes the wrongfulness of the trespass while tacitly supporting the normative order and pledging that the rule breaking will never happen again. When successful, an apology promises a new self in an old body, one that will be more diligent in honoring the social contract.

Accused deviants can account for their trespasses (Scott & Lyman, 1968). An *account* is a verbal statement that functions to relieve individuals of responsibility for what they have done. Two types of accounts exist, *excuses* and *justifications*:

An excuse is an admission that the act in question was bad, wrong, or inept, coupled with a denial of full responsibility. A justification is an admission of full responsibility for the act in question, coupled with a denial that it was wrongful. (Lyman & Scott, 1989, p. 136)

If a defendant in a court of law were to claim that he or she was insane at the time of the crime, this would be an excuse. The defendant is claiming that he or she did not know the difference between right and wrong and so should not be held responsible for what happened. If, however, a defendant were to claim that he or she broke into a stranger’s cabin to avoid an impending blizzard, this is a justification (called *necessity* in a U.S. court of law). The accused is not claiming that something external (or internal) negated personal *responsibility* for the breaking and entering; the intruder

knew fully and exactly what he or she was doing. However, in this situation, the possibility of greater harm (death by freezing) is being used to *justify* the illegal entry (breaking and entering) of someone else's cabin. Humans, even when they are *outside* a courtroom, will use similar strategies to convince others (or try to) that they were not responsible for whatever happened or even that the deviance was actually necessary (i.e., justified) under the circumstances (Iturriaga & Saguy, 2017).

The existence of an exception to following rules that are still viewed as important and necessary is a regular part of human encounters. When excuses “work” (i.e., are accepted as reasonable claims), the individual who might have been held responsible for the deviance is let off the hook, because it is concluded that the reason for the trespass was some factor (external or internal) over which the rule breaker had no control. When justifications “work” (i.e., are accepted as reasonable claims), a rule breaker is forgiven for the trespass, because it is concluded that it was actually demanded by the situation, being therefore unavoidable and thus blameless (Yagil & Luria, 2014). We are prepared to exonerate some individuals for some rule breaking *if* they are able to account for these trespasses in acceptable ways. Individuals who refuse to offer accounts to others for their trespasses—or fail to apologize for them—face the prospect of not being reintegrated into the group (Young & Thompson, 2011).

One of the best things for a rule breaker is to be in a situation where nobody even knows that something untoward has happened, even those who have suffered some loss because of it. This is the case with *hidden* or *secret deviants*. They need not worry about dealing with injured parties who may demand restitution or even want the rule breaker punished for what was done to them. It is possible for some rule breakers to take advantage of others in one way or another, causing losses for them, but still keep them from realizing that they have been intentionally victimized, which Goffman (1952) called “cooling out the mark.” One example is when an individual who has been cheated during a game of cards, losing both money and self-respect, is persuaded by the cheat to believe that the outcome was simply a matter of bad luck and nobody's fault.

Square Pegs and Round Holes: Eccentrics and Eccentricities

Danielle Willis is a vampire, or so she claims. She sleeps by day; works by night (she's a fiction writer); and drinks human blood, partly for nourishment and partly because it excites her. She paid her dentist to install a permanent set of porcelain fangs over her incisors. She does not change into a bat and then bite hapless victims on the neck, however. What she does is use a syringe to extract blood from a willing partner (whom she is confident has no blood-borne diseases) and then drink it, either right on the spot or at some later time. For Willis, the consumption of the bodily fluids

of another is an expression of intimacy and trust. Hundreds of vampires like Willis live throughout the United States, and some of them believe (or at least hope) that drinking blood ensures their immortality (“Interview With a Vampirette,” 1997). Are these people real bats, just batty, or something else?

Eccentrics are quirky or even odd people who have thrown off the bonds of conformity and who pursue whatever wild hair intrigues them. Some eccentrics are successful people, and their eccentricities are just part of what they are. Other eccentrics have gained fame and fortune because of their eccentricities, which shape their lives and their identities (Nash, 1982). Still other eccentrics are abysmal failures at practically everything they do, partly because they are obsessed with their eccentricities. If an individual has the forbearance, ability, or good luck to triumph in some field, his or her eccentricity is likely to be overlooked or even admired. However, if an eccentric fails to gain prominence in some valued field of human endeavor, then his or her oddness is more likely to be disturbing to others, and he or she is more likely to be condemned or ridiculed (Wallace, 1957).

The label of eccentric—like all labels—is relative, and the ground rules for what makes one eccentric change all the time. Alexander Wortley had a deep suspicion of zippers in men’s trousers, so he removed them from any pair he purchased. The reason? He did not want a lightning conductor so close to such a sensitive body part (S. Adams & Riley, 1988). Wortley’s anxiety over genital shocks is not at all unreasonable; it is how he went about protecting himself from electrocution that seems strange. The Reverend George H. Munday was a renowned Quaker preacher in nineteenth-century Philadelphia. Parishioners gathered by the hundreds to hear his sermons but mostly to observe his odd trait: He refused to wear a hat at a time when all male Quakers did (Sifakis, 1984). Joseph Palmer moved to the city of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, in 1830. Some of his new neighbors shunned him, and others threw rocks at him (and at his house). Businessmen refused to cater to him, and religious people prayed for his redemption. Women avoided and feared him, often crossing to the other side of the road when they saw him coming. What was Palmer’s problem? He was one of the first individuals in the United States to grow a long beard. This was so upsetting to others that one day, four men armed with scissors and a razor attacked him, threw him to the ground, and tried to shave him forcibly. Through all his trials and tribulations, he steadfastly kept his beard. His gravestone in Evergreen Cemetery in Leominster, Massachusetts, tells the story. It reads, “Persecuted for wearing the beard” (Sifakis, 1984, pp. 69–70).

Some eccentrics are what they are because accidents of birth made their pursuit of novelty more likely. Michel Lotito (1950–2007), also known as Monsieur Mangetout (“Mister Eat Everything”), a Frenchman from Grenoble, had an amazing ability: He could eat practically anything. When he was 16, he was drinking mint tea with friends at a French cafe,

and the rim of the glass accidentally broke off in his mouth. Instead of spitting the piece out and complaining about the defective glass, he chewed the piece up and swallowed it. Because he experienced no adverse effects, he soon realized that he had a special talent (Flaherty, 1992). He went on to become a professional entertainer whose performance consisted of eating his way through things, such as television sets, aluminum skis, supermarket carts, bicycles (he liked the chain the best), razor blades, coins, glasses, bottles, bullets, and phonograph records. He even ate an entire airplane—a Cessna two-seater—piece by piece. Lotito would cut objects into bite-size pieces, lubricate his digestive tract liberally with mineral oil, and drink lots of water as he ate the debris. Surprisingly enough, though he could eat stuff that would kill an ordinary person, he had difficulty digesting bananas and eggs (S. Adams & Riley, 1988). Lotito was awarded a brass plaque by the *Guinness Book of World Records* to commemorate his eating eccentricities. He was so honored that he ate it (Flaherty, 1992).

Gourmandizing, which is excessive eating, was popular in the United States in the early 1900s as a form of freak entertainment. Now it is a competitive sport, and contests are regularly held with winners receiving prizes worth thousands of dollars. An International Federation of Competitive Eating even exists to promote the sport. In 2014, a competitive eater named Molly Schuyler, 5-foot-7 and 125 pounds, broke a Texas restaurant's record for eating steak. She ate almost 10 pounds of steak, along with side dishes of baked potato, salad, shrimp, and bread rolls, in just about 15 minutes. In February of that year, at a Philadelphia restaurant, the woman ate 363 chicken wings in 30 minutes. Four years later, she upped the bar again, eating 501 buffalo wings in 30 minutes at Philadelphia's 26th annual Wing Bowl.

Other eccentrics methodically plan ways to be different and systematically carry them out. One such person is Ashrita Furman (born Keith Furman), who as of this writing has the most records in the *Guinness Book of World Records* held by a single individual. He has traveled to about 30 different countries to try to break records. One of the ways he gets in the book is by inventing new things to do that will establish a record, such as the fastest mile by someone balancing a baseball bat or underwater pogo stick jumping. Sometimes, Furman does ordinary things in extraordinary ways or in unusual places. For example, in 1979, he set his first record by doing 27,000 jumping jacks, and in 1986, he did somersaults along the same 12-1/4 miles that was traveled by Paul Revere on his famous ride in Massachusetts in 1775.

Eccentrics occupy an indeterminate status. They are fascinating to others (and may even be a source of envy), while they are also upsetting to them. Eccentrics believe that they are right in what they do, and they are not usually unhappy with their unconventionality. They tend to do exactly as they please, and they are usually unconcerned with what is proper or what others want them to do.

Eccentrics are people who take boundless joy in life, immoderate men and women who refuse to violate their ideals. Their minds are always buzzing furiously with ideas. . . . At the root of eccentricity is a healthy and determined irreverence. (Weeks & James, 1995, p. 254)

The eccentric's unbridled freedom and independence of thought and action (or is it irresponsibility or some slavish obedience to the goal of being weird?) may rub others the wrong way. What gives eccentrics the right to do whatever they want when the rest of us cannot?

Eccentrics may actually be more alarming than some other kinds of deviants. To be sure, their eccentricities rarely break the law, but this does not mean that eccentrics are simply amusing individuals, providing some spice to life. Whereas most deviants know the difference between right and wrong and do not flaunt or challenge the rules openly, the eccentric seems to be out of touch with the ordinary concerns of ordinary folk. Not only is the eccentric odd in the eyes of others, but he or she also goes to great lengths to be different and separate, defends his or her oddness as perfectly proper, is indifferent to the expectations and wishes of others, and appears unable or unwilling to understand why others would be upset by him or her. Whatever tensions that might exist between individual desires and the forces of social control have been resolved successfully by the eccentric in favor of his or her own interests (Suran, 1978). Eccentrics' trespasses may be minor and relatively benign, but they do them with such gusto, irreverence, self-centeredness, assurance, and guiltlessness that they can take on an ominous and foreboding quality.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that attributes (the principal element in "conditions" in the ABCs of deviance) are themselves a source of categorization and judgment. People are stigmatized for things over which they have little or no control. "Normal" and "stigmatized" are *perspectives* on persons, so we always will need a language of relationships to be able to discuss and understand any discrediting or discreditable attributes. An error occurs, called the fundamental attribution error, when observers attribute the cause for some happening to individual character instead of to the social context in which it occurs. Cause and blame are not identical, but decisions about blame and responsibility always have direct implications for who and what is deviant.

When the label of deviance is attached to some attitude, behavior, or condition, it usually involves some fundamental decisions about conventionality (Could it have been otherwise?) and theoreticity (Did the

individual know what he or she was doing?). These decision rules help assess responsibility for some event, which leads quite easily into decisions about who or what is deviant. Such interpersonal processes are responsible for the social construction of spoiled identities and the stigma that comes from it. Deviance can easily evolve into a master status and be accompanied by a great deal of shame and embarrassment. Reputations can be tarnished or even irreparably damaged. Retrospective interpretation is a dynamic process in which a person's social identity is reconstituted in the eyes of others. It is possible for accused deviants to impact what happens to them by using neutralizations, rationalizations, atonements, apologies, accounts, or cooling-out strategies. When any of these is successful, it is possible to have a great deal of deliberate rule breaking without anyone being held responsible for it.

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