

Sociological relativity – meanings & actions are always relative (not universals).

Relativity is a way of examining standards and customs by understanding their context. As Curra tells us, deviance, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, and it exists because some groups decide that other groups ought not behave the way they do.

Social things are not timeless, universal, or self-evident and are always relative or specific to a particular time and place.

- **Deviance definitions are also relative to who is doing the defining, who is observing the deviance, who is responding to the deviance.**

Cultural variability – the social world we inhabit exhibits tremendous variation.

Human experience and social life display remarkable variability and diversity; human attitudes and behaviors, social norms and values, conditions and experiences vary markedly across time and space, across cultures, and among groups. Social things are not bound by a single human nature but a diversity in activity befitting the adaptive role of culture.

Human cultures and ways of organizing themselves vary according to the needs of people, the problems they have to solve, or the commands they must obey.

- **The cultural variability of humans means that anything regarded as deviance will be variable as well.**

Social possibility – occurs because flexibility is built into human cognition & behavior.

Since we will find a great deal of human diversity practically everywhere we go it is clear that humans are capable of a wide range of possibilities. Flexibility is built into humans and their adaptability to changing circumstances. It's how we survive.

As Curra points out, it's not that *anything goes* but it does mean that there is a wide range in how things *could go*. We must be open to the possibility in the alternative ways humans have lived and the potential for how humans can live in the future. Ethnocentrism, however, compels us to perceive the world only according to our social standards and thus deny variation and possibility.

- **Social possibility is limited only by ethnocentrism.**

Reality is socially constructed – things are real because we define them as real.

Attitudes, behaviors and conditions are not inherently meaningful but must be defined so by people and meanings must be constructed and attached to them. Humans create their world by naming, labeling, and categorizing things. Names have consequences – they tell us what things are but also how we should behave. When we define the world we're also telling ourselves how to act in that world.

The consequence is that meanings people adopt become habits and customary ways we think about & act toward others. These can result in self-fulfilling prophecies: "define me so, treat as such, leave me no options & I will become the "other" you claimed."

Our perceptions & actions can be inconsistent – people may be physically or culturally different but if we don't perceive them as such, it's as if those differences DON'T exist. Likewise, people may be physically or culturally the same as us but, if we perceive them different it's as if they ARE fundamentally, essentially, and basically different.

- **The trick of a successful social construction is to obscure its "as-if" nature.**

How deviance is socially constructed – what we need to know

Joel Best has argued that the most credible sociological approach to deviance is to study deviance as social problems – troubling behaviors, people, or conditions that the public or others argue should be the focus of attention, concern, and action. As Best writes, "Social constructionism has become an influential stance for thinking about deviance, particularly for understanding how concerns about particular forms of deviance emerge and evolve, and for studying how social control agents construct particular acts as deviance and individuals as deviant" (2016: 107).

All that is required for a deviant act to exist is for a significant number of people or a number of significant people to regard it as such. Consequently, all forms of deviance share but a single characteristic – that they defined as deviant. It is the subjective judgment of and reaction to conditions or actions that make something or someone deviant. It is the subjective responses of people – what they regard as deviance – which we can objectively observe.

- **The question for sociologists is how: how do people turn their subjective judgments into actions that will deter, control, punish, manage, help, and care for deviants.**

