

SOCI 2305 | Deviance | Spring 2026
Seeing deviance, there and here, then and now
(20 points)

In a world where nothing is truly reasonable, nothing is truly mad

Father Albertus (in The Advocate)

Background. The most basic way we think about deviance is that it refers to the rule violations and rule violators. Social rules are the behaviors and attitudes expected by others (norms) that reflect customs and practices, some formalized and carrying moral weight and significance while others are more informal, reflecting local manners and standards of time and place. But things get complicated when we realize that these rules (standards, laws, values) vary across time and culture. What is regarded as unexceptional and acceptable in one culture, group, place or era can at another point of time or place be treated as seriously objectionable, even abominable.

When we encounter such relativity, our certainty of what's normal and what's right can be shaken. What we currently know about the world can become disorienting when others in another time or place customarily do the opposite. One possible path is tolerance and empathy.

Ethnocentrism, however, often provokes intolerance and sentiments to impose the will of one's group over those whose world is very different.

Things get more troubling when we realize that those in authority who can rightfully exercise power and control over us (order and rule) brutally mistreat and wrongly punish people solely because those in authority say so. Here acceptable agents of social control (those in criminal justice or medicine or social work or religion) exercise control for reasons and motives that are anything but sensible, moral, or reasonable. This is the war story Stephen Pfohl writes about in this week's readings. Sadly, this war story is playing out in our cities.

We can also see how these matters play out in this week's video. The movie, *The Advocate*, provides us a unique window into the past - the moral-religious-political landscape of medieval France. The movie depicts life, fear, and crime common in a 15th century provincial French village. Its portrayal illustrates how the designation of deviant acts and deviant persons could be understood from a "demonic" perspective. Much of what was normally regarded as deviant was attributed to demonic forces. And officials dutifully responded in reasonable and also bizarre ways to stamp out evil and punish those guilty of wrongdoing. The movie also reveals how the law (order and rule) operated with double standards, meting out cruel and deadly punishment for some, leniency and penance for others, and all the while fostering the fear that order and rule was supposed to allay. It also should give us pause about what we take for granted or commonsensically regard as deviance.

Video workshop. We're exploring the relativity of deviance, using the movie as our database. Use the attached worksheet to record data observations from the video.

We will watch excerpts from the movie in today's (January 28) and Monday's (February 2) classes. Based on the data you've gathered, prepare a brief report answering the following questions:

- Why would people today regard acts that were common and normal back in the 15th century as deviant?
- How might people - elites and commoner alike - in the 15th century Abbeville react to common and customary life in the modern world? What would they find seriously objectionable?
- How can time and place matter in what we find offensive and harmful, that is, deviant?
- Finally, and following Pfohl's "naturalistic observations about spiritual perspectives on deviance", think about the importance back then of prosecuting a pig for the murder of a boy or condemning to death a donkey for participating in sexual relations with a farmer or the fear provoked by the arrival of non-Christian travelers. Is the matter simply one of "things are relative" or were there other aims behind the prosecution of the pig, execution of a donkey, and public revulsion of the travelers? Explain your response.

Writing: Your report needs to be typed, double-spaced, printed, stapled, with your name, the course number, and the assignment title at the top of the first page. Include the video worksheet with your report. Reports are due in-class, Wednesday, February 4.

You can watch the video again - it's available from my Vimeo-com account. From the online copy of the data workshop instructions, click on the links below to view/stream the video. When prompted for a password, type *students2020*.

The Advocate, Part One [28:48 minutes]
<https://vimeo.com/252796767>

The Advocate, Part Four [1:04 minutes]
<https://vimeo.com/252717527>

The Advocate, Part Two [5:06 minutes]
<https://vimeo.com/252799227>

The Advocate, Part Five [31:19 minutes]
<https://vimeo.com/252800483>

The Advocate, Part Three [11:48 minutes]
<https://vimeo.com/252799656>

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Video Workshop One – Seeing deviance, there and here, then and now – Worksheet

The movie, *The Advocate*, presents a credible account of everyday life in a 15th century French provincial village. We will use it as the data source for deviant behavior – behavior, attitudes, and beliefs, of townspeople, officials, and elites – that were recognized and punished in 15th century Abbeville.

Data observations – then. As you watch the movie, write down 3 instances of behavior, attitudes, beliefs, or practices in 15th century Abbeville that people in the movie regarded as objectionable and punishable in some form but would not offend people today.

a.

b.

c.

Data observations – now. Identify three common and normal practices behavior, attitudes, beliefs, or practices in 15th century Abbeville that people today regard as objectionable and possibly punishable.

c.

d.

e.