

Preface

Pat Lauderdale

The conventional wisdom of American society and much of the professional knowledge within the social sciences assumes a clear and distinct line between political and deviant activity. This distinction has become increasingly blurred by sociological and historical studies that reveal the political nature of deviance. Although overt political conflict between economic groups, status groups, and professions has received much attention, the present work goes beyond such studies to examine the subtle political dimensions of deviance for which clear historical episodes of political conflict have not been found. Those dimensions are most evident when new categories of deviance are being created or old categories being transformed. The chapters in this book examine aspects of political life and their relationship to the study of deviance that are typically ignored or suffocated before they become public.

In essence, this volume suggests that all definitions of deviance are in some sense political. The major problem we address is under what conditions does a form of action come to be defined as deviant or conversely redefined as normal.

This book exists because a number of friends survived the five-year period from inception to completion. The friends are Gerald Larson, Mary Jane Lehnertz, Steve McLaughlin, Phil Smith-Cunniën, and Jeff Stitt. Their support went beyond cheerful encouragement and editorial comments regarding the manuscript. The book emerged from extensive conversation with these people and included their continued search for useful material. It was not an easy task for them because I initially proclaimed that the book would take only five months to complete. In addition, they managed to convince me that it would be impossible to include all relevant studies, especially those that came out during the processing of the book. I am disappointed that the time involved in processing the final copy precludes the integration of the most recent work. I am responsible for the embarrassing length of time it took to finish as well as those parts of the book that assume a kaleidoscopic quality; my friends did all they could.

It also happens that I have had the good fortune throughout the revisions of the book to work closely with James Inverarity. Although we disagree on a number of intellectual issues, and I imagine we will continue to disagree, his critical reviews and substantive additions to all parts of the book are greatly appreciated. He is, in fact, responsible for the better portions of the text.

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P. L.