Introduction to “Crime and Deviance”:

"Deviance" is a wide-ranging term used by sociologists to refer to behavior that varies, in some way, from a social norm. In this respect, it is evident that the concept of deviance refers to some form of "rule-breaking" behavior. In relation to deviance, therefore, the concept relates to all forms of rule-breaking (whether this involves such things as murder, theft or arson - the breaking of formal social rules - or such things as wearing inappropriate clothing for a given social situation, failing to produce homework at school or being cheeky to a parent, teacher and so forth - more-or-less the breaking of relatively informal social rules). As should be apparent, criminal behavior is a form of deviance (one that is defined as the breaking of legal rules) and, whilst we will be concentrating upon this area of deviance, it needs to be remembered that it is only one aspect - albeit a very significant one - in relation to the concept of deviant behavior in any society. As a general rule, therefore, we can say that there is a distinction between crime and deviance in terms of: "All crime is, by definition, deviant behavior, but not all forms of deviance are criminal". Generally, the study of "crime" tends to be seen as the preserve of the criminologist, whereas sociologists tend to focus their attention and interest upon the wider social implications of all forms of rule-breaking (and, of course, rule creating) behavior in any given society. However, as we shall see, this does include the analysis of crime and criminal behavior considered as forms of deviance. In passing, it might be useful to note that we will necessarily have to look at various other concepts surrounding the issue of deviance (such as those of ideology, power, social control and so forth) if we are to understand the concept sociologically. A discussion of such concepts will form part of the general theme of this series of notes, but for the moment it is probably sufficient just to draw your attention to the need to understand the concept of deviance in terms of the ways in which different societies develop different conceptual frameworks regarding deviance ("ideology") and the way in which different social groups may be able to create and impose conceptions of deviant behavior upon others ("power" and "social control").