Question 1: What are norms?

Answer 1: A norm is essentially a shortened version of the word *normal*. In other words, a norm determines where the greatest percentage of the population lies with regard to behavior, thoughts, or decisions. Norms are rules that are determined and communicated by the social environment—usually parents, teachers, and overall culture. An example of a norm is, "Do unto others as you would want others to do unto you." Another way to think of a norm is as expected behavior. One would not expect an individual to run down the street naked because it is a norm to wear clothing when in public. If an individual's behavior, thoughts, or decisions are outside the norm, then that individual could be subject to ridicule, questioning, and discrimination simply because that individual is different from the norm.

Question 2: Who determines a norm?

Answer 2: A norm is determined by the majority culture. For example, if a group of Hispanic individuals (say 50 total) moves into a predominantly Caucasian community (say 175), then the Caucasian culture is the dominant (or norm) culture. The standard for dominance is whether over 51% of the individuals share the same culture. If the Caucasian culture valued Protestantism while the Hispanic culture valued Catholicism, for example, then there would be a greater number of Protestant churches and possibly only one Catholic church.

Question 3: What is conformity?

Answer 3: Conformity is the result of silent pressure from others who may shape an individual's behavior. An example of this is a standing ovation at a concert or performance. Pressure to conform has been linked to areas such as personality disorders and even suicide.

Question 4: What is compliance?

Answer 4: Compliance results when an individual behaves in a certain way because of the pressure to be like the group. This pressure can be spoken or unspoken. Individuals who comply with certain behaviors believe that such behaviors will make them fit in with the group and will provide social acceptance.
Question 5: How does society create stress?

Answer 5: Society creates stress through norms, conformity, and by encouraging compliance. In Western cultures, individuals are viewed as successful if they have high-paying jobs, drive an expensive car, have a large home, and possess other "things." However, in the process of achieving these things, many individuals go bankrupt or spend most of their time away from home, which sacrifices time spent with the family. For those individuals who acquire wealth, stressors can include worry about thieves, appropriately investing money, worries about the safety of the stock market, and worries about identity theft. For example, an individual has a low-paying job, so the individual is concerned about having enough money to support the family. This individual, however, also spends every evening at home to have dinner with the family and often plays games with the family and reads books to his or her children. Then the individual gets a higher paying job but is not home very many evenings and does not spend much time with family.

The individual is better able to provide financially for the family, but he or she worries about not spending time with the family and whether the children are angry or upset because of not seeing the individual on a frequent basis. Depending upon society's focus at the time, the individual may be accepted for the high-paying job but may be socially ostracized for neglecting the family. The efforts to comply with social norms create stress, and it is for that reason that each individual must determine what is important. Norms can change, but change takes time and effort.

Question 6: What is deviance?

Answer 6: From a sociological perspective, deviance is an identified violation of a cultural norm. Some forms of deviance, such as crime, are recognized by nearly all members of society. Other forms, such as cigarette smoking, are recognized as only mildly deviant (although smoking was considered normal only a generation ago).

Question 7: Is deviance normal?

Answer 7: Surprisingly, many sociologists believe that deviance has a role to play in society. Their arguments are as follows:

- Just as good cannot exist without evil, deviance is needed to define morality.
Social Norms and Deviance

• By defining deviance, society sets boundaries between right and wrong.
• Responding to deviance promotes social unity. For example, the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 united the American people as they had not been since World War II.
• Deviance encourages social change. What is considered deviant today may be normal 50 years from now. For example, in the 1950s, few women had careers; today, a large majority of women work outside the home.

Question 8: What are some of the causes of social deviance?

Answer 8: Robert Merton's strain theory holds that the extent of deviance in a society is proportional to the means that are available for a person to achieve cultural goals, such as financial success, through accepted methods. For example, people raised in poverty may resort to selling drugs or other crimes because they see little chance of achieving success through talent, education, and hard work. Other groups of people may choose to reject or rebel against cultural goals that they believe are unattainable; these groups include alcoholics, street people, and survivalists. In some instances, deviant social behavior may be less motivated by financial gain than it is by the desire to gain respect in the eyes of society.