

Social control theory essay



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In providing a proposal for living, our culture supplies sets of norms and values that structure our behavior. They tell us what we ought to believe in and what we ought to do. Because we are brought up to accept them, for the most part we do what we ought to do and think, as we ought to think.

Only for the most part, however, since none of us follows all the rules at all time. Social controls are the forces and processes that encourage conformity. An understanding of deviance and nonconformity requires that we first consider what brings about conformity. Social control consist of the forces and processes that encourage conformity, including self-control, informal control, and formal control. Through Self-control, we police our selves.

Self-control occurs because individuals internalize the norms and values of their group. They make conformity to these norms part of their self-concept. Thus, most of us do not murder, rape, or rob, not simply because we are afraid the police would catch us but because it never occurs to us to do these things; they would violate our sense of self-identity. A powerful support of self-control is informal social control, through it, our friends and intimates reward us for conformity and punish us for nonconformity. Informal social control self -restraint exercised because of fear of what others will think.

Thus, even if your own values did not prevent you from cheating on a test, you might be deterred by the thought of how embarrassing it would be to be caught. Your friends might sneer at you or drop altogether; your family would be in you; your professor might publicly embarrass you by denouncing you to the class. If none of these considerations is a restraint, you might be

scared into conformity by the thought of formal social control, administrative sanctions such as fines, expulsion, or imprisonment. Through formal social control the state or other authorities discourage nonconformity.

Formal social control Cheaters for example, face formal sanctions such as automatic failing grades and dismissal from school. Whether we are talking about cheating on examinations or murders, social control rest largely on self-control and informal social controls. Few formal agencies have the ability to force compliance to rules that are not supported by individuals or group values. Sex is a good example. In many states, sex between unmarried people is illegal, and you can be fined or imprisoned for it. Even if the police devoted a substantial part of their energies to stamping out illegal sex, however, they would probably not succeed.

In contemporary United States a substantial proportion of unmarried people are not embarrassed about having sex relations, they do not care if their friends know about it. In such conditions, formal sanctions cannot enforce conformity. Prostitution, marijuana use, seat belt law- are all examples of situations where laws unsupported by public consensus have not produced conformity. People may break out of cultural patterns for variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. Whether your nonconformity is regarded as deviant or merely eccentric depends on the seriousness of the rule you violate.

If you were bib overalls to church or carry a potted palm with you everywhere, you will be challenging the rules of conventional behavior.

Probably will care too much, however, these are minor kids on nonconformity. Every society must have some system of social control, a set

of means of ensuring that people generally behave in expected and approved ways. Some of this social control over the individual can be exercised by other-either formally through such agencies as the police and government inspectors, or informally through the reactions of other people in the course of everyday life. All norms whether they are codified in law or not, are supported by sanctions, rewards for conformity and punishment for nonconformity.

The positive sanctions may range from an approving nod to a ceremony or public acclaim; the negative sanction may range from mild disapproval or even execution. Only the tiny fraction of social behavior can be policed by formal agencies of control, and most sanctions are applied informally. If you help your neighbors and are polite to them, you will be rewarded with smiles and popularity. If you use bad language in the wrong company or offer your left rather than your right when someone wants to shake hands with you, you will receive raised eyebrows, glares, stares, or comments designed to make you uncomfortable and therefore more likely to conform to social expectations in the future.

Most social control, however, does not have to be exercised through direct influence of other people. We exercise it ourselves, internally. Growing up in society involves the internalization of norms-the unconscious process of making conformity to the norms of one's culture a part of one's personality, so that one usually follows social expectations automatically without questions. Like the chief on Tahiti and like people all over the world, we think and act in ways that are to a great extent shaped by the society we live in, though we

are seldom aware on this fact. For the most part, we behave the way we do because that's the way it uses to be.

Not all people who find society's norms inapplicable to their situations will turn to a life of crime. People who accept both society's goals and its norms about how to reach them are conformists. Most of us conform most of the time. When people cannot successfully reach society's goals using society's rules, nevertheless, deviance is likely result. One from may take is innovation; people accept society's goals but develop alternative means of reaching them.

Innovators for example may pursue academics achievement through cheating athletic achievements through steroids or economic success by becoming gangsters. In these instances, deviance rests on using illegitimate means to accomplish socially desirable goals. Other people who are blocked from achieving socially desired goals respond by rejecting the goals themselves. Ritualists slavishly go through the motions prescribed by society, but their goal is security not success.

Their major hope is that they will not be noticed. Thus, they work carefully, even compulsively. Although they appear to be over conformers, they are still considered deviant because they have rejected our society's values on achievement and upward mobility. They have turned their back on normative goals but are clinging desperately to procedure. Retreatists on the other hand, adapt by rejecting both procedures and goals.

They are society's dropouts; the vagabonds, drifters and street people. The norms of society are ultimately an expression of its values-socially shared

ideas about what is good and desirable (Panopio, 1978). The difference between values and norms is that values are abstract, general concepts; whereas norms are specific guidelines for people in particular kinds of situations. The values of society are important because they influence the content of its norms. If a society values education highly, its norms will make provisions for mass schooling. If it values a large population its norms will encourage big families.

In principle at least, all norms can be traced to a basic social value. For example, the norms that require a student to be more polite and formal to a professor than the other students express the value society places on respect for authority and learning. The mid-century norms that insisted on short hair for men reflected the high values placed on men's masculinity, a value that was threatened by long hair because it was regarded as effeminate. Although all norms express social values many norms persist long after the conditions that gave rise to them have been forgotten.

The folkway that requires us to shake hands, especially when greeting a stranger, seems to have originated long ago in the desire to show that no weapon was concealed in the right hand. The folkway of throwing rice or confetti over bride and groom may seem rather than meaningless, but it actually stems from an ancient practice of showering newlyweds with nuts, fruits, seeds as symbol of fertility.