

Deviance

Sociology



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Deviance Introduction Deviance refers to any behavior that infringes cultural norms with sufficient severity to necessitate disapproval from the society.

There are two kinds of deviant activities; formal and informal deviance.

Formal deviance refers to the violation of formal laws and includes acts such as murder, rape and assault among others. Informal deviance involves infringement of informal social norms such as being nude in public places, loud belching and picking ones nose among others.

The concept of deviance is complex because the behaviors that people consider being deviant vary from one culture to another. What one society may consider deviant may be acceptable to another. For example, in some parts of Africa, Indonesia and Malaysia just to mention a few, circumcision of women is a mandatory cultural practice, while in some countries such as the US considers the practice to be oppressive. This paper explains the concept using the labeling theory and also examines my personal view of deviance.

Labeling Theory

According to this theory, individuals become deviant because of two reasons; the society labels a deviant label to an individual, and the individual adopts the label by showing the behavior, attitude and actions associated with that label. This approach recognizes cultural relativity and that deviate can come from power imbalances. The theory illustrates how an individual acquires a deviant identity through deviance labels. This way, people become deviant because other people force identities on them, which they then adopt.

Labels are names that people associate with role sets or identities in society.

Deviant labels are identities that fall outside cultural norms such as loner.

The theory breaks down deviance into two parts. An individual gets an identity and then exhibits actions and attitudes associated with the identity.

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When an individual adopts a deviant identity, his or her actions and attitudes change to fit the new identity. This process is also known as retrospective labeling.

Once the society labels a deviant, in most cases, the label becomes dominant or master status, which now achieves a paramount status than all other aspects of the individual. Each label has its own prejudices and images that make others interpret in a certain way. Labeling can mould the behavior of a person especially that individual cannot shake off the label.

The theory also emphasizes on the issue of stigma on deviance. Stigma involves the disqualification of an individual from full social acceptance following a label or infamy that is hard to disguise or hide. Stigma extends this theory by showing how the society can use characteristics of an individual to attach labels, which can alter their life entirely.

The consequences of labeling can be far reaching on the individual. Social research has shown that individuals that the society has branded with negative labels have low self esteem. Such individuals reject themselves, and tend to exhibit more deviant behaviors in line with the label. The society has a hand in such deviance since people can hardly change their opinions pertaining to the labeled individual.

Conclusion

The theory advances my definition or understanding of the concept. My view of deviance has not changed at all after following the theory. My understanding of deviance is any behavior that does not follow the stipulated norms of the society in which one lives. Deviant individuals usually take their behaviors through labeling. Powerful personalities in society such as judges, politicians and doctors impose extremely significant labels. The various

labels in society include prostitutes, criminals, retarded, alcoholics and drug addicts among others.

Works Cited

Henslin, James M. Essentials of sociology: a down-to-earth approach. 5th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2004. Print.