

Deviance in social psychology assignment

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Deviance in Social Psychology Deviance is a major issue needing further exploration in social psychology in reference to its relationship to symbolic interaction and shared meaning. Deviance is defined as behavior that violates the rules of a group- the shared generalized other. Since social organizations create shared meaning of appropriate conduct by originating norms, behavior that does not conform to social expectations is relative and may differ amongst groups. According to sociologist, David Emile Durkheim, deviance is a vital component of a strong civilization.

It provides the non-deviants an awareness of cohesion by repeatedly emphasizing the significance of the rule being violated. By penalizing deviants, the group conveys shared indignation and reestablishes its obligation to the rules. Durkheim asserts the actual purpose of punishment is not the deterrence of potential crimes, but to reassert the significance of the rule being violated. Defining certain actions as law-breaking establishes the boundaries for what is socially acceptable behavior; thus, deviance is not only a consequence of social structure but necessary for it.

The symbolic interaction perspective is based on how humans develop a complex set of symbols to give meaning to the world; therefore, understanding the symbols is important in understanding human behavior. Increased research should be explored in regards to deviance as it relates to social psychology with emphasis on shared meaning because a reciprocal relationship exists between larger societal processes and their influence on the individual.

The labeling theory emphasizes the importance of society in defining what is illegal and in assigning deviant status to particular individuals; consequently, this dominates their identities and behaviors. Sociologist, Howard Becker, describes how particular rule-breakers assume the label of “deviant” as a salient identity. When the identity is the role to which one most relates the view of oneself, he/she becomes an outcast and is denied the resources to be successful in daily life.

Therefore, in some cases, the individual returns to illegitimate means of survival. This “secondary” type of deviance is more prevalent when the imposition of the label is accompanied by a sense of injustice. Progressively, the ultimate stage in the emergence of a career criminal entails the advancement of the rule-breaker into a deviant subculture. The association of the categorized deviant with an organized group provides the individual with moral support and a self-justifying rationale.

From Charles Horton Cooley’s perspective, the labeling theory would be parallel to his theory of the “looking-glass self”. The theory asserts that persons imagine how they appear to others, they imagine what their judgment of that appearance should be, and they develop some self-feeling such as pride or mortification, as a result of conceiving others’ judgment. The looking-glass self theory maintains that the notion of the self is related to the interaction with and perception of how others view the individual.

As one considers others’ responses to his/her behavior, he/she then has a propensity to adjust to obtain further desired responses. According to

sociologist, William Chambliss, individuals from a lower socioeconomic class are: 1) more likely to be scrutinized and observed in any violation of the law 2) more likely to be arrested if discovered under suspicious circumstances 3) more likely to spend the time between arrest and trial in jail 4) more likely to go to trial 5) more likely to be found guilty and 6) if found guilty, more likely to receive harsh punishment.

Persons categorized as being in higher socioeconomic classes are much more likely to avoid the label of “criminal”. In referencing the labeling theory, the delinquent responds to him/herself in the same way society might; thereby, taking the role of the generalized other towards him/herself. “Society” is the glass in which the individual is looking into for his/her reflection; consequently, as the culture defines deviance and labels persons as such, many times the individual will take on the characterization accordingly.