Informative essay on sociology: deviance

Sociology

" Deviance refers to any behaviour that is considered to be violating social norms or to persons that engage in such behaviour" (Adler & Adler (2009: 21). Deviance does not just occur to any form of behaviour, but we need to bear in mind the fact that behaviour or people that are deviant are only defined as deviant if and only if society views that particular behaviour as deviant (Adler & Adler (2009: 21). Deviance can either be positive, which is over conformity but is at the same time positively evaluated by the audience (Heckert, 1998: 23).

There is also negative deviance, which is under conformity but on the other hand negatively evaluated, rate-busting, which refers to those individuals who under conform but are negatively evaluated by society and there is also another term referred to as deviance admiration, which is the " bad boy" image, which is under-conformity but somehow admired and positively evaluated by society or groups in society (Heckert, 1998: 23). Deviance has no fixed definition but instead, it is broad and has various definitions linked to the term.

There are however 5 basic definitions for deviance insociologynamely, the Reactive constructionist approach, the Normative approach, Violation of rights, Absolutist approach and lastly, the Statistical approach. The reactive constructionist approach focuses on the reactions of an audience, which is society to certain behaviours. This is when behaviour is only considered deviant if it has been condemned by society. It involves publicly labelling behaviour as deviant and also followed by an equally negative reaction by the public (Dodge, 1985: 18).

The normative approach on the other hand defines deviance as a " departure" or going against the set or generally accepted norms in society (Dodge, 1985: 20). Usually, the norm that has been violated is not usually put into place or is not usually in existence until a behaviour, which society reacts to, is seen as unacceptable and therefore deviant and then the norm is put into place and into existence after such occurrences.

The statistical approach focuses on the behaviours that differ from average or normal experiences of society. In this case, the deviant individual or group of individuals engages in behaviour that the majority of the people do not engage in (Heckert, 1998: 25). This form of approach is mainly applied when analysing organisations. With the violation of rights approach, behaviour is considered deviant if it, in any way, violates the rights of any other individual. The individual or individuals hat are considered are labelled and they receive a negative reaction from society for their behaviour. Lastly, the absolutist approach of deviance claims that deviance resides in the very nature of an act and is wrong at all times and in all places (Heckert, 1998: 28). It does not have to depend on theenvironment, the reaction of the audience or the punishment and severity of the act. Principles of right and wrong are applied and an act is deviant once it goes against those principles.

With the case of Amanda, who was heavily criticised by the public for killing her sister by stabbing her with a bread knife, the reactive constructionist theory is most applicable because according to her mother, she was just an innocent girl, who made a terrible mistake and herfamilydid not battle forgiving her, but because the media reacted in a certain way, which was negative and the reaction eventually spread and influenced the rest of

society in which they started condemning Amanda and making her life miserable, to the extent that she also condemned herself and started hating herself to the point where she believed she was evil and deserved to die. Another issue with deviance is the issue of stigma.

Stigma refers to the negative gap or some form of division between the deviant individuals and the people who are not deviant or do not go against the norms of society (Goffman, 1963: 3). There is usually a lot of tension by the " normal" people and it is always the deviants that have to suffer and manage the tension because they are usually the minority group in the cases of deviant acts (Goffman, 1963: 7). Amanda had the stigma of a killer or brutal murderer attached to her by the public and throughout the rest of her life, had had to endure suffering at the hands of the public. She had to cope with the labelling and the gossiping that constantly surrounded her.

With the issue of stigmatisation, the individuals who are suffering also have the option of managing the stigma. In Amanda's case, the one most relevant option that she did have and fairly used was turning to stigmatised others, such as people she was imprisoned with and by turning to sympathetic others, which in this case was her mother and her friends for support and coping because there was not much she could have done such as support groups etc. because she had spent a lot of time in prison (Goffman, 1963: 14). In Amanda's case, she has her family supporting her saying she is not at fault, in other words that her behaviour was not deviant, while on the other hand, the public viewed her behaviour as deviant.

This then brings us to the question about whether there is a difference between deviance and crime. Some crimes may be thought of as deviant but

not criminal and other, criminal but not deviant. The safest route to go by is simply saying that the difference separating deviance from crime is the breaking of the law, which is considered a crime or the violating of the social norm, which is deviance (Marshal and Meier, 2011: 16). Basically, people could engage in criminal behaviour, which may be accepted in a particular society, such as drinking and driving, but because it is not generally frowned upon, those people are accepted and are not considered deviant by their society.

One other person on the other hand, may commit a deviant act, such as Amanda, who was said to have attacked her sister unintentionally, but because society rebukes such, she is considered a deviant, an outcast and is labelled and has no freedom to live her live as she pleases without people making it miserable for her. Labelling, which is closely linked to stigma, refers to the public seeing the deviants as different to anyone else and are mainly carried out by moral entrepreneurs (Marshal and Meier, 2011: 17). There are three different forms of labelling which can be taken into consideration, which is primary deviance, secondary deviance and tertiary deviance. These forms or theories of labelling come with consequences as well.

In the case of primary deviance, an individual is given a label but they are not affected by such, so they basically ignore and deny the label given to them by the public (Marshal and Meier, 2011: 21). The second scenario, which is secondary deviance, individuals are given a label and so as a form of escapism, they then live up to that label that they have been given, such as someone being call uptight, condescending or in simpler words, a snob,

then tends to try and intimidate and bring people down by all means possible (Marshal and Meier, 2011: 20). With tertiary deviance, an individual is labelled, but refuses to neither deny nor accept and instead tries and proves that there is nothing deviant about their behaviour (Marshal and Meier, 2011: 19). In Amanda's case she was both primarily and secondarily labelled.

Her family tried denying the primary labelling for her, but rather she took up secondary deviance, where she actually accepted that she was a murderer and that she deserved to die like a murderer. Moral entrepreneurs are those individuals who try to create and enforce new definitions of morality and what is deviant and what is not (Adler & Adler, 2009: 136). These new definitions that they try and enforce are mainly put in place to try and benefit them and what they believe in (Adler & Adler, 2009: 137). In many cases, if not all, there is always a number of moral entrepreneurs and not just one and they are each trying to act at their own self-interest (Adler & Adler, 2009: 137).

In Amanda's case, the main moral entrepreneurs are the society, Amanda and her own mother. Society created a label for Amanda that she carried with her and was never removed until the day that she died. Society saw her as a criminal who deserved to be punished because in that society, killing people with bread knives was not considered moral, even though they did not know the main reason or what had exactly happened. Amanda on the other hand did not see anything wrong that she had done and instead got negatively influenced by the stigma that had been attached to her and

therefore saw herself as a deviant that deserved the most severe punishment possible.

With Amanda's mother, she saw her daughter as the innocent one victimised by society. She blamed society for her daughters' misery claiming that she had not done anything wrong, even though it was evident that she had murdered her own sisters for reasons unknown, but because she did not see anything wrong with her daughters actions, she believed that she should not be punished even though murder is considered a crime and should therefore be punishable. They then in a way were seen to be a folk devil, which means that they were viewed as a threat and a bad influence to society (Dodge, 1985: 28). It is rather astonishing how Amanda's case eventually turned out.

Some people, mainly family were on her side, while the whole public was against her. Now it is a mystery as to how such situations can be explained and justified. Why would, in one society, people have different beliefs? According to the Marxist socialist theory of deviance, society is not based on consensus and shared values, but rather, it is an outcome of the continuing struggle between the social classes, the elite and the proletariat (Marshal and Meier, 2011: 19). In this form of society, which is mainly a capitalist society, there are individuals who exploit others and those who are exploited and therefore those who commit crime are doing those who are exploited justice (Marshal and Meier, 2011: 19).

In Amanda's case, there is no clear reason as to why the crime was committed, but her sentence was not heavy and therefore this could also be a sign as to how much influence they had on the ruling system, showing how much those who are influential can control everything in society ranging

from economy to politics and laws. Amanda's case is a clear example of what we call moral panic. Moral panic, according to Cohen (1972), cited in Victor (1998: 542), is societal response to beliefs about a threat from factors or individuals known as ' moral deviants'. The group of individuals become defined as a threat to the values as well as the interests of that particular society and they are presented in this way by the mass media and other key actors (moral entrepreneurs).

Society managed to foster moral panic because a widespread concern about the issue was promoted by much attention by society and basically the whole issue eventually took center stage. According to Adler & Adler (2009: 137), moral panic must be triggered by specific event at the right moment, draw attention to a specific group as a target, have provocative content revealed, and supported by formal and informalcommunicationoutlets, which in Amanda's case happened because now her tragedy attracted much attention from society and basically caused a panic. This again just proves how deviance has no set barriers, but instead the classification of deviance has no set or particular traits, but rather, behaviour is seen as deviant only based on the social definitions that vary from society to society at different times. Society is the biggest role player in distinguishing deviant behaviour and through moral panic, they managed to exclude, label and target deviants because they have gone against what is believed to be social norms.

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