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# The Relevance Of Deviance And Labelling Theory In 21st Century

In this essay I will be discussing how relevant and useful are of the insights which were generated during the 1950s and 1960s, by deviance and labelling theorists and researchers, and how they still make sense within the 21st century.

With deviance the insights which were generated during the 1950s and the 1960s show that there are subcultures within deviance which can be divided within three categories as stated by Steve Case, these start with the first one in which he says “draws on justification from purely ‘criminal values’, and so it is based on seeking material rewards by illegitimate means”. He then goes onto state that the second category “is populated by whose status is earned by exercising their force and the perpetration of domination with violent means”. And the third category that Steve case mentions is then “represented by alienation and retreat from conventional roles, which may be evident within drug cultures”.

This is relevant for the 21st century because deviance still plays a huge part within criminology. They appear within the mainstream norm, behavioural expectations and the values. Though as Merton in 1957 outlined, “the denial of regular opportunities or status and the attractions of alternative routes to some sort of social standing apparently combine to offer pathways into criminality, and even an alternative rebel identity for young people should they choose to follow this course”. This means that it is still relevant to the 21st century even though it is 50-60 years old, as many of those who follows deviance is young people and that if they are from a certain social standing it can mean that they will go into criminality. Another reason why deviance is still relevant in the 21st century is because, depending on how someone is either brought up or if a young person is subject to conformity, it would end up structuring that young persons life.

With labelling theory it has a two-fold process, so in which the initial commission of an offence, which would be primary deviance, would be subsequently compounded with the experience of being processed and then formally identified as an offender, this then would lead towards secondary deviance. With the use of research, McAra and McVie in 2007, they drew on findings from the ‘Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime’. They analysis which they conducted shows that criminalisation of young people would depend extensively on selective police responses, in which ‘boys and disadvantaged children’ would be found to be discriminated against the police, in terms of the initial decision whether or not to bring charges. The reason why this is relevant within the 21st century is due to the younger men being classified as the ‘usual suspects’ within crime. This means that they are more likely to be

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labelled as criminals and become deviant within society.

In 1951, Edwin Lemert proposed in which there were two types of deviancy, in which he called them 'primary and secondary deviance'. It states that the primary type is temporary, and would be often 'secret'. It would have no long-term harm for the offender due to either the act does not "cause a social reaction", though, if it does the reaction is not very strong or even stigmatising. With the secondary deviance it has a deeper long-term consequences, in which the cases, the offender's act is then caused by the way they came to think about themselves. In which the impact would be socially labelled as a criminal or a deviant and may have a psychological impact on their self-identity. This is then relevant to the 21st century because with both deviance and the labelling theory, once someone has committed a crime or an act that can be seen as being deviant, they are then labelled that way, so it would take a toll on them and they would still act in that way after being labelled as it wouldn't matter anymore to them.

With the labelling theory, the insights that came from this in the 1950s and 1960s are still relevant during the 21st century. This is because with labelling theory, it highlights a social reaction, which can range from truancy to under-age drinking, which would provoke little reaction from others. Though there are some problems with the labelling theory, in which criticisms were made about it, one of these criticisms were, "Criminologists were usually unhappy about its neglect of the origins of deviance. Labelling theory failed to provide any account of the initial motivations steering individuals towards deviance". This is slightly relevant to the 21st century as the labelling theory still exists and it does start to take away from deviance, though it makes those who have been labelled as deviant, are then less encouraged to change their ways. It is also relevant because labelling theory has become known under a completely different name, which is "Social Constructionism". This includes an approach that argues "conditions must be brought back to people's notice in order to become social problems". This means that it acknowledges the different ways in which people, as either individuals or as a society will come to label certain types of people or different things, which in turn would then relate back to what people would think of that certain issue or person, which is done today, with individuals and even societies labelling certain groups of people due to their religion or culture, and giving them a stigma that they are not to be trusted.

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