

University Forum

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Institutionalized deviance

Deviant behavior in society can be considered that behavior which is unacceptable; that behavior which is labeled as not conforming to the required rules, standards, regulations, norms, mores, values, etc.; that behavior which threatens to uncover the accepted meanings by using opposing meanings. Thus, there are many kinds of deviance, that is, many ways of viewing the world. Politically, however, one view of the world may dominate over another view. It is to the advantage of the dominant view to remain the dominant view. Alternate views are not only suspect, but considered threatening, evil, bad, nasty, wrong, immoral, unethical, etc.

I am most interested in what I call "institutionalized deviance." I take this term to mean that the culturally, or socially or politically dominant group maintains a stated view of the world, which in practice it does not actually uphold. In other words York University maintains that as an institution it wants to further learning, disseminate knowledge, seek truth, free the mind from rigidity and contribute to the intellectual, spiritual, social, moral and physical development of those who study within its "humanitarian" walls. If learning is frustrated, if knowledge is not freely disseminated, if the truth is hidden, if the mind is rigidified and if the intellectual, spiritual, social, moral and physical development is retarded and sabotaged, then York University deviates from its stated objectives.

When an institution which claims to represent itself as just and right is in fact the opposite, and when it claims that there are those who deviate from its just and right program, then that institution tries to legitimate itself by maintaining its power and discrediting anyone who questions that power or authority. As an actor in the social world I am fascinated by this "labelling process," as a citizen of a social system I am responsible for the decisions made by that system.

I shall be the last one to claim that I am an objective social scientist, but I shall be among the first to claim that I am a responsible social man. Therefore, I have a deep concern with immoral institutions which claim the highest morality or with institutions which maintain themselves and their freedom at the expense of individuals and their integrity and worth. When institutions and men who maintain these institutions legitimate themselves in order to discredit others, and when these same institutions deviate from their own stated objectives, social reality must be uncovered, the pretenses thrown off, the party goes unmasked and the world-as-taken-for-granted no longer taken for granted. The sociologist is intellectually irresponsible if he cannot see further than his own self-fulfilling definitions. Furthermore, he is irresponsible and morally reprehensible if he continually legitimates institutions which he finds deviant, repressive, irresponsible, undemocratic and defective.

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policy decisions which have an effect on the entire University community, since these people are a self-perpetuating elite body of predominantly upper-class businessmen and since these people do not represent either the University community or society at large, they act not only from their own self-interest, but more importantly undemocratically. As a public institution, the University's objects and purposes can in no way be furthered by this kind of monolithic, unresponsive, undemocratic structure, namely, the Board of Governors.

This is as much my University as it is Mrs. Eatons. What gives her more decision-making power than me? Can she decide what is in my best interest? Can she decide what is in the University's best interest?

The Senate, the second half of the University's bicameral system of government, makes all final decisions regarding academic policy. Since it consists predominantly of University deans and faculty members with a small number of student senators, academic decisions rest primarily with the faculty. It is important to note that students make up the majority of the University community; that they will hopefully one day carry the responsibility for continuing this community, but that while in the community decision-making power and responsibility are not given to them. They are either considered immature or like the "insane" unable to know what is to their best interest. Those students who attend Atkinson college are termed "mature." Does this term not apply to day students?

Who in fact has a greater interest in the University? A member of the Board of Governors? A faculty member? An administrator? A caretaker? A student? None of these has a greater interest, but they each have an interest. How is that interest defined and who defines the interest? It is quite clear that those people who have the power to make decisions also have the power by means of these decisions to define what is to the interest of whom. Thus, Board members make policy and financial decisions, Senators decide academic policy, administrators administer, professors teach, caretakers take care and students learn. This is accepted; this is taken for granted. Is this, however, the most effective, most human, most efficient way to run a University?

Is the University merely a supermarket for ideas? If this is in fact the case, then the student's interest is merely that of a supermarket shopper. If the supermarket shopper is wise, he will either seek the cheapest prices, or the finest quality merchandise. If he accepts the cheapest

prices, he sacrifices the finest quality. If he accepts the finest quality, he sacrifices the cheapest prices. It's a choice he makes not only because he thinks it is impossible to get both, but more importantly because he thinks he is in a supermarket. The argument runs that supermarket shoppers come and go and have no continuing interest with the supermarket. They buy their goods and leave, and remaining behind is the manager and his staff. In order for the supermarket to exist continually, the shoppers must buy continually. If you observe most supermarkets and their clientele, you will find that the clientele do not continuously change supermarkets.

In other words as much as the supermarket needs a manager and his staff, they need their regular customers. Now, if these customers remain ignorant about the products which they purchase, that is, quality, quantity and price, then they will receive whatever the supermarket manager and his staff offer for sale. If, on the other hand, the shoppers become wise, they can force the manager and his staff to offer better quality, quantity and price, namely, the shoppers can boycott. They can through advertising discredit the supermarket, its manager and his staff. In other words students do have the power to make authority, that is, Board members, administrators and faculty respond to their needs, values and desires, but only on the assumed condition that students are truly concerned with the quality, quantity and price of their education.

An undesirable society is one which internally and externally sets up barriers to free intercourse and communication of experience. A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through the interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder.

Thus, everyone who participates in a social system which is democratic has an equal share in the control of that system. In other words, faculty members of the Senate, even though they have many years of experience, do not have the exclusive right to make long-term academic policy, because of the inherent nature of the world in which we live, namely, that it is a rapidly changing world. This means that students are also

probably very much in tune with these changes and at the ripe age of nineteen are quite able to decide what they would like to learn. If academic decisions are not shared equally by students and faculty, then not only are many significant and valuable learning experiences denied, but also the student's maturity, responsibility, trustworthiness and intelligence are demeaned and ignored.

We are constantly acquiring new meanings, new definitions. Boundaries are continually broken and constructed in a fluid flexible, continuous, adaptive process. Nothing remains new very long. Each new generation begins where the old leaves off. The young are now quite able to teach the old. In fact, "this sort of reversal," according to Robert Jay Lifton, "becomes more and more necessary in a rapidly changing world in which sons must constantly teach their fathers new things, which they, the fathers, as older people cannot possibly know." In short, in order to make a society work power and responsibility must be shared. In order for education to take place, experiences must be exchanged. Each individual must be valued for his own inherent dignity and worth. Harold Taylor, who at thirty years of age became president of Sarah Lawrence College learned that,

... a student body entrusted with responsibility for an equal share in reaching decisions about educational and political policy was the strongest antidote in existence against falsity and hypocrisy of all kinds, including that to be found among Communists, Democrats, Republicans, Socialists, faculty members, administrators, parents, or the human race in general. What students need is not protection, but freedom and responsibility, and the chance to show what they can do when they come to grips with the issues confronting their generation and ours. History accords its honors without regard to age, and alters its course in response to those who act within it. We could do history no greater honor than to recognize that fact and to realize that the younger generation must have equal opportunity to act in the world while they are learning about it.

Yes, the students have power! This phrase portends an end to the University's "innocence." Or an end to the predominance of Mind over Matter. Like Descartes' dualism, which no longer gives us an accurate picture of the universe, the arrangement of power in the university no longer reflects the continually emerging values of everyone associated with the University. When those in power in the university are unresponsive to newly emerging values and needs, then that university is no longer a viable institution. It has forsaken its objects and purposes which are the advancement of learning, the dissemination of knowledge and the intellectual, spiritual, social, moral and physical development of its members and the betterment of society. This is what I have called "institutionalized deviance."

By Edwin Rothchild