Interpreting "Adolescent Rebellion" based on labeling theory

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Abstract: Labeling theory originates from the study of deviant behavior. It emphasizes that "social norms lead to deviant behavior," suggesting that the emergence of deviant behavior is a process of being labeled. "Adolescent rebellion," as a socially defined deviant behavior, arises from the negative interactions between adolescents and adults and is a phenomenon where adolescents are labeled after violating the social norms of the adult world. There are two consequences of the labeling of "adolescent rebellion." One is the stereotype of adolescents by society, and the other is the self-identification of adolescents with "adolescent rebellion." Thus, the labeling of "adolescent rebellion" is also legitimized.

Keywords: Labeling Theory, Adolescence, Rebellion

1. Introduction

The discussion of "adolescent rebellion" initially focused on analyzing the personal physiological and psychological factors contributing to it from biological and psychological perspectives, with the belief that "adolescent rebellion" is a negative emotion[1].Later, the academic community began to examine the external environmental factors of "adolescent rebellion" from the viewpoints of pedagogy and sociology, proposing that it is a consequence of family education, school education, and social influences. It is considered a normal part of the socialization process for adolescents [2]. People have increasingly come to view the issue of "adolescent rebellion" in a more objective, scientific, and impartial manner. However, it can be observed from previous studies that people have already formed a preconceived assumption in their minds before analyzing the issue of "adolescent rebellion, "namely, that the term" adolescent rebellion "is legitimate. In fact," adolescent rebellion" originates from the negative interactions between adolescents and adults. It is a judgment made by adults about adolescents and a label affixed to adolescents by the adult community. Therefore, there will be many new findings in reinterpreting the issue of "adolescent rebellion "from the perspective of labeling theory.

2. The Origin and development of labeling theory

Labeling theory originated from the study of deviant behavior (also known as delinquent behavior). Deviant behavior refers to actions that violate social norms, also called rule-breaking or deviant actions. The earliest explanations for deviant behavior were the "demonic possession theory, "which held that individuals engaged in deviant behavior because they were possessed by evil spirits. In the West, it was believed to be a punishment from God for those who engaged in deviant behavior. In the 19th century, biology and psychology began to study deviant behavior. The former argued that deviant behavior was the result of biological abnormalities inherited genetically, while the latter suggested that it was an aggressive behavior towards society and others resulting from individuals facing difficulties and setbacks. In the mid-19th century, people started to explore the issue of deviant behavior from the perspectives of social culture and social structure, studying the emergence of deviant behavior through the process of social interaction, and labeling theory was proposed.

The earliest proponent of labeling theory was Tannenbaum, who pointed out in his book" Crime and Society" that social conflicts prompt the occurrence of illegal behavior, and crime is a type of deviant behavior identified by criminal law. According to Tannenbaum, deviant behavior is defined by others in the

process of social interaction. Later, Lemert explained the formation process of deviant behavior. In his book "Social Pathology," he divided deviant behavior into primary and secondary deviance. He believed that everyone might occasionally engage in some deviant behavior, and if no one pays attention, both the individuals and the actors themselves will deny the existence of deviant behavior. However, once such deviant behavior is made public, family members, friends, and public authorities will identify this deviant behavior, which may then continue to occur until the deviant actor ultimately acknowledges it, thus forming the labeling of deviant behavior. Subsequently, those around the deviant actor will hold prejudices against them, and the deviant actor will continue this behavior within their social group. In 1963, Becker systematically elaborated on labeling theory and published the book "Outsiders," in which he proposed many new viewpoints. Becker argued that the power elite in society first defines social norms, categorizing actions that violate the norms of the social power group as deviant behavior. It is social norms and social control that lead to deviant behavior. Becker overturned the long-accepted logic of "deviant behavior leading to social control" and changed the approach of "analyzing the generation process of deviant behavior from the deviant actor themselves." From the perspective of the social norm setters and advocates who label deviant behavior, he studied deviant behavior through the interaction between the labelers and the deviant actors. Becker's labeling theory has significant theoretical and practical implications for analyzing contemporary-defined "deviant behavior."

3. Defining "Adolescent Rebellion" as deviant behavior

3.1. Defining deviant behavior

There are two opposing views in academia regarding the definition of deviant behavior. One perspective asserts that deviant behavior does indeed exist and has distinct characteristics that set it apart from non-deviant behavior. The other view suggests that deviant behavior may not necessarily exist; rather, it is merely behavior that has been labeled as deviant. The former viewpoint is represented by positivism, which posits that deviant behavior is an innate characteristic of individuals' physiology and psychology that deviates from the norm. It is considered an objectively real phenomenon caused by external factors. Positivism focuses on the deviant actor themselves and emphasizes the analysis of the causes of deviant behavior. The latter viewpoint is represented by constructivism, which argues that deviant behavior is a voluntary choice made by individuals, socially defined, and artificially constructed. As Becker stated, "Deviant behavior is behavior that people so label."[3] Becker's labeling theory suggests that deviant behavior is a violation of the norms of the mainstream social group. These norms include formally established and maintained regulations by law, customs formed through tradition, and implicit norms agreed upon through consensus.

3.2. Defining "Adolescent Rebellion" based on labeling theory

Relevant studies suggest that the rebellious phase is a period of resistance and danger, specifically referring to the period during which adolescents, due to physiological and psychological changes in puberty, often exhibit rebellious attitudes and behaviors. It typically occurs around the ages of 14 to 17.[4] In this definition, emphasis is placed on the innate physiological and psychological factors of certain age groups, attributing adolescent rebellion to these inherent characteristics. However, later research has challenged this view. Some studies point out that rebellion is not just a characteristic of adolescents; it accompanies people throughout their lives. The process of human growth is essentially a rebellious process of breaking free from constraints.[5] Thus, attributing "adolescent rebellion" solely to innate physiological and psychological factors is an oversimplified explanation. Labeling theory emphasizes that "adolescent rebellion" is a behavior that has been labeled. Rebellion, by its very nature, implies thoughts and actions that go against the grain. In the context of adolescence, rebellion refers to thoughts and behaviors that contradict the demands of parents and teachers and deviate from the behavioral norms of schools and society. Labeling theory posits that deviant behavior is any action that violates group norms. The group norms that "adolescent rebellion "contravenes are those of the adult community. For instance, in China, these adult community norms are primarily influenced by the traditional Confucian culture of "filial piety." The sayings "Among all virtues, filial piety comes first "and" Filial piety is the foundation of moral character "highlight the significance of

"filial piety" in Chinese traditional culture. In traditional society, "filial piety" was mainly applied to hierarchical relationships such as those between children and parents, and subjects and rulers, emphasizing the obedience of juniors to seniors and subordinates to superiors. This traditional filial piety culture continues to influence the interaction between younger and older generations in modern society. When the thoughts and actions of the younger generation go against the demands and norms of the older generation, the younger generation is labeled as "rebellious." Parents and teachers, as adults, often uphold their own authority and the absolute rationality of traditional social norms. They attribute the responsibility for children's deviant thoughts and behaviors to the children themselves, considering them the direct agents of these actions. "Adolescent rebellion" is a label affixed to minors by the adult society. Labeling theory reveals the underlying inequality in the interaction between adult and adolescent groups in the phenomenon of "adolescent rebellion."

4. The labeling process of "Adolescent Rebellion"

4.1. "Adolescent Rebellion" as a result of collective action

Humans grow up in a collective environment, and collective action is formed through interactions among people. Therefore, individual behavior is influenced by the surrounding environment. Individuals adjust their actions based on the behavior of others within the group, and this process involves issues of interest. When an individual's interests are not infringed upon or the infringement is within an acceptable range during the adjustment of personal behavior, the individual's actions will align with the collective actions. However, if the individual's interests are harmed in a way that is intolerable during this adjustment process, the individual's behavior will deviate from the collective action.

Adolescents' interpersonal interactions mainly include two aspects: communication with peer groups and communication with elder groups. Peer groups primarily consist of classmates, companions, and friends. Within these peer groups, adolescents can find common topics and express themselves more freely. However, adolescents are also prone to a "conformity" mentality, seeking recognition from their peer groups. Their values and behaviors can easily influence each other. Therefore, some immature and impulsive thoughts and behaviors can reasonably exist within these peer groups.

Elder groups mainly refer to school teachers and parents. Interactions between adolescents and elder groups occur within a hierarchical relationship based on age. Adolescents tend to suppress their emotions and thoughts. If elder groups lack appropriate communication and parenting styles, communication barriers will arise between adolescents and elder groups. The adolescents' desire for independence and respect will be severely impacted, leading them to distance themselves from elder groups, deviate from the behavioral norms of elder groups, and turn to peer groups to seek the realization of their self-identity and value.

4.2. "Adolescent Rebellion" as a process of labeling

Who sets the social norms? This involves issues of power. Becker believed that in the operation of society, the establishment of social norms is determined by the amount of political and economic power. The norms of social groups with more political and economic power naturally become the mainstream norms of society. Within a small social organization, the status and the amount of discourse power are the decisive factors for the organization's norms. The family, as a basic social unit, is dominated by parents who set the family norms. Adolescents are in a relatively weak position in the family and are the followers of family norms. In schools, teachers are the authorities, and the main targets of educational norms are students. Whether in the family, school, or society, the norm setters and enforcers are the adult groups with the primary discourse power, and adolescents are the followers of norms and the objects of discipline. The behavior of adolescents is required to follow the norms of adults, which is a manifestation of the authority of the adult world. Under the traditional Chinese clan system, people's practical activities were carried out within the dependence of family and hierarchy, and their lifestyles were also marked by strict identity and social status. Adolescents showed great dependence and obedience in a patriarchal and paternalistic society, with their personalities being extremely suppressed. The development of modern commodity economy has brought abundant material wealth to society, and at the same time, free and open values and lifestyles have also become popular. People's ways of expressing themselves have also shifted from the real world to the virtual network

society. The personality expression of adolescents can be realized in a diverse and open real society and virtual society. Conflicts and deviations arise between the free choices of adolescents and the rigid adherence of the adult world. Adolescents can only achieve behavioral conformity and self-identity within adolescent groups or the virtual world. The gap between adolescent groups and adult groups thus emerges. Therefore, the behavior of adolescents is defined by the adult world as "adolescent rebellion."

5. The consequences of labeling "Adolescent rebellion"

5.1. Society's stereotypes of adolescents

The term stereotype was first introduced by Walter Lippmann. It refers to the fixed impressions formed about certain groups of people based on classifications such as gender, race, age, or occupation, which are commonly believed to be associated with specific characteristics and behaviors. Solomon Asch applied schema theory to quickly form impressions of others. Subsequent scholars expanded the content of stereotypes to include conceptual aspects such as the values and attitudes of relevant groups. Thus, stereotypes categorize the external features, behavioral habits, and ideological concepts of social human groups based on anthropological characteristics, assuming that different groups possess certain similar traits. Later scholars criticized these preconceived and subjective stereotypes, arguing that they overlook individual differences and the social development of people, employing a rigid and homogenizing perspective to view social groups and individuals within them. For example, E. Aronson stated: "A stereotype is a generalization about the characteristics or motives of a particular group, attributing the same traits to every member of the group without considering the actual differences among group members."[6] Stereotypes are overly simplified, outdated, and generalized views that people form about social groups.[7]

"Adolescent rebellion "is a stereotype of the adolescent group. When the term "rebellion" is mentioned, people immediately think of "adolescence," believing that rebellion is a unique phenomenon among adolescents. When adolescence is mentioned, people naturally associate it with a series of somewhat negative words such as irritable, impulsive, adventurous, blind, radical, and aggressive [8], reflecting the adult group's prejudice against adolescents without specifically understanding each adolescent's growth environment and experiences or comprehending their true needs. Society's stereotypes of adolescents mostly stem from the experiences summarized by predecessors in parent-child education or fragmented reports and promotions by media. Due to different living environments and family upbringing methods, adolescents have diverse personality traits. Moreover, as society develops, people's social characteristics are also in a state of continuous change and development. Therefore, in the modern open and pluralistic era, with the gradual improvement of people's ideological and cultural quality and humanistic literacy, it is necessary to break through the previous rigid stereotypes and re-recognize and treat the adolescent group. We should learn to understand this group more scientifically, comprehensively, and fairly, avoiding one-sided, subjective, and partial views.

5.2. Adolescents' Self-identification with "Adolescent Rebellion"

Adolescents' perception of their social identity and status comes from both self-cognition and social definition.[9] Self-cognition mainly involves adolescents' positioning of their own roles from their own perspective, while social definition refers to the stipulations or recognitions of adolescents' social roles by society. Self-cognition and social definition interact with and influence each other, producing two possible outcomes: consistency and contradiction. Consistency means that self-cognition aligns with social definition, while contradiction indicates that self-cognition is inconsistent or even divergent from social definition. "Adolescent rebellion" is a common understanding of the unique characteristics of adolescents' growth period by the adult group, which believes that adolescents' thoughts and behaviors do not match the roles assigned to them by the adult world and even deviate from them. Therefore, the adult society uses" adolescent rebellion" as a synonym for adolescents. When the social definition of "adolescent rebellion" is widely used to define the adolescent group, and since adolescents are in a critical period of growth and learning, they gradually come to identify with society's definition of them as "adolescent rebellion," achieving consistency between social definition and self-cognition. Ultimately, the label of "adolescent rebellion" is legitimized, and adolescents accept the adult world's norms for the adolescent group. On the

one hand, adolescents desire freedom, openness, and independence, while on the other hand, social norms have a certain degree of closedness, dogmatism, and traditionality. Thus, there is a contradiction and conflict between adolescents' needs and social norms. In the end, either adolescents sacrifice their own needs to conform to traditional social norms and become the "good children" in the eyes of adults, or they violate social norms and find their self-identity within their own world or peer groups.

6. Conclusion

"Adolescent rebellion "is the result of the hierarchical interaction between adolescent and adult groups. When discussing the issue of "adolescent rebellion," the focus should not only be on the adolescent group but also on the adult group. It is essential to explore the substantive issues hidden behind the label of "adolescent rebellion" through the real-life interactions between these two groups.

7. References

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