

SOCI 2005 B – November 21, 2012

Emilie Durkheim – Suicide

Suicide: A Study in Sociology

Normally what we think about is individual pain and suffering.

He is NOT looking into why people feel despair. He is looking into what those feelings have to do with social structures and what in the outside world causes us to feel this way.

How people respond to social disruption

Regulation

Empirical claims that Durkheim's making about suicide are essentially useless because his data set is flawed. When he looks at records indicating suicide in Catholic societies they are not entirely accurate because Catholics avoid writing suicide as a cause of death if they can because they view it as a sin.

He begins by saying that when animals have desires what they usually desire are basic things like food and a place to sleep. These things are usually given in natural circumstances. Humans also have these basic needs but are made more complex because we don't just stop at our needs. Not just a place to sleep, but a nice warm and comfy place to sleep. Humans have unlimited appetites.

External Regulation

There is nothing like the size of our stomach that stops us from loving Rihanna like there the size of our stomach stops us from eating too many strawberries.

There will never be an end point, where you are satisfied if you are relaying on something that is infinite, like happiness, to satisfy us.

His conviction is that non-physical passions, desires, loves are bottomless. If we need to regulate, the regulating course will be non-physical, non-material.

The regulating force for regulating non-physical passions is society.

Society meaning, social facts, and the collective conscience.

Society alone has the power to stipulate law with peoples rational consent and put into place things like fines if you break the law.

Society as a Regulatory Force

How does society regulate non-physical desires?

What counts as being beyond what you need changes.

It is now acceptable for everyone to have indoor plumbing and outside the norm if you do not have it.

What is the social space that makes it unacceptable to spend \$62,000 on a lipstick?

Society sets limits, hierarchies

We have a shift in how the social world is laid out.

One of the reasons crime is normal is that allows the change for the social world to shift.

Durkheim says: We acknowledge and accept the limits that society sets for us. It is not something that is forced on us. We rationally choose this.

Yes, even though he says that the social world deeply shapes us and who we are.

We are happiest when our own desires line up with that of the social world and we are not fighting the social world.

All the things that go along with being embodied; sleeping, eating, dancing, are less than the things that are framed as the things that make us human. All of our non-animalistic functions are governed by society.

Core ideas:

- Because society has a regulating capacity over us, it regulates our passions, when society leaves that role, we are out of sync and there is an increase in suicide.

- We have physical limits on our needs, there's an external regulator for those things. We become full when we have eaten enough food. Our internal desires have no internal regulator. Our passion for Rihanna is beyond any external regulator.

- Society is the thing that puts a limit on our internal

- Suicide rates go up when there is not enough to eat AND when there is more than enough to eat: in both of those situations, society has been destabilized and can no longer play a regulating role on our impulses and desires.

- We are happier when society regulates all of those things that are not physical.

Suicide

How and why societies are pathological or sick or not functioning as they should.

Attempts to make a claim about what a healthy society is supposed to look like.

Indexing, equate one thing to another thing, 32 degrees Fahrenheit is so many degrees in Celsius.

Looking to index suicide, x number of suicides indicates an unhealthy suicide.

A healthy society is one in which people are content and happy in their role.

Why attend to suicide?

Attend to Durkheim's purpose in this text

We can say that looking at suicide in a society shows us the social conditions even if people are not killing themselves. That tells us that other people in that social world are feeling cut off from their social world.

Suicide is a meaningless death, it is not necessary, it doesn't do anyone any good and it harms people. Therefore we want to attend to it.

Four kinds of suicide.

In the text there are only three because they excluded fatalistic.

Focusing on the first three though!!

These are on a continuum.

Egoistic: a belief that we are all alone. A sense of not being connected, not having a sense of your role in society. Egoistic is opposite of the altruistic suicide. Essentially feeling cut-off. Alexis uses the example of Bella in the second Twilight book/movie.

She keeps doing things that endangers her life so that Edward will appear to hear in her mind, like throwing herself off a cliff and riding a motorcycle. Another example given is academics.

Altruistic: being in an activity where you know you are giving up your life because you don't have a strong sense of pursuing your own needs. For example suicide bombers, or people who throw themselves on a grenade to save others. Even being in the military, joining something that is bigger than you and might result in your death. Durkhiem believes this happens in primitive societies (another one of his racist ideas).

Anomic: being unregulated. You no longer experience society placing an end point to your desires. Unrestrained desires and infinite disappointment. There is nothing that catches you and provides support. For example a rockstar, like Amy Winehouse, she was behaving in a way that could kill her. She is unrestrained from the social norms that keep us from harm. Another example is Henry Ford's son who had everything in life, the only left for him to experience was death. Lottery winners is another example.

Fatalism: so intensely confined in the social world that there is no way out and no point in living. A complete loss of control over your own life. For example, people who are in prison for life, or slaves. Another example, farmers in so much debt that they will never be able to pay off are killing themselves because they feel there is no other way out.

Core idea for suicide: as society changes and becomes less stable, it becomes unable to regulate us. This increases suicide.