Assignment 1: Abnormal Observations

Normality and abnormality are intricate terms that can be defined differently depending on the individual and situation. Since every human being is different, his/her view on what is considered normal or abnormal will vary from one person to another. When an individual is determining what he/she considers normal or abnormal, the decision can be rooted in statistical norms, cultural norms, evolutionary factors, or upon moral considerations. Statistical norms are deemed “normal” based on the behaviors of the majority of individuals who possess the trait or characteristic. Cultural norms are grounded on behavior that is specific to a certain group and the social background in which the phenomenon is observed. On the other hand, evolutionary factors reflect experiences that promote survival and reproduction. Lastly, moral considerations are based on the views of the observer in any given situation. The following paragraphs will discuss some of the unusual interactions I have experienced within the past week as well as why I perceived them to be abnormal. Everyone has a different opinion on what is normal and abnormal, these are just some of the things I have observed.

One event I have experienced in the past week was an interaction with an individual who lives in my dorm. This individual would walk into my room quietly and stand in the corner without saying a word. He would not create a conversation or have any reason for coming into my dorm room. One night many of my hall mates were gathered in casual conversation. He stood in the corner quietly while everyone else talked. When asked a direct question, this individual would respond by typing up his response on his phone and then showing the answer. I found this action abnormal because he can talk, but he chooses to communicate in this manner. Generally, when a person is face-to-face with another, a conversation would take place through talking rather than a read and write type method.

I thought this action was abnormal because of cultural and social norms. Generally, in today’s culture when an individual walks into another person’s room, one would expect that the person would engage in some type of conversation or would have a reason for a meeting. The social norm, in today’s world, in my opinion, is that one should have a conversation when in the same room by talking. This individual’s action is very different from the vast majority of people I know, thus I perceived his method of communication abnormal. Personally, when I walk into someone’s room I make an initiative to greet and talk to them about something, hence when this individual walked into my room without saying a simple “hello” I found him to be very abnormal.

While abnormalities may occur with strangers, it can also be seen within one’s family and friends. For instance, the other day my dad asked me to get a blue hat from his closet, but I could not find a blue hat. When I went to the closet I searched through scarves, gloves, jackets, and hats. However, there were only black, gray, and brown colored hats. When I returned and told my dad that I could not find the hat, he reassured me that the blue hat was in the closet. Next, he accompanied me to the closet to find the hat, and he had picked out the only black hat with a small blue logo. I had completely ignored this hat because it was dominantly black, and I had not noticed the blue logo. Apparently to my dad the black hat with a blue logo is considered to be a blue hat.

I found this experience very abnormal because it violated social and statistical norms. According to Horwitz, “A striking characteristic of the statistical conception of normality is that it isn’t a characteristic of individuals, but rather a quality of the distribution of a trait within a particular group” (2008). Vast majorities of people, including myself, would refer to an object by its dominant color instead of the color on a little part of the object. My dad was referring to the color of the insignificant detail that I easily overlooked. Thus, based on Horwitz’s logic, my dad’s description of the hat is statistically abnormal. Similarly, this occurrence can be viewed from an evolutionary perspective as abnormal. For example, if a woman was fighting for her life and urgently needed medication but had to have a friend bring it to her, and she described the medicine bottle by the insignificant, rather than the dominant color, it can cost her, her life. In this type of situation, the individuals that present this abnormality are at a disadvantage because their life can be threatened.

Next, as I was walking to the bus stop alongside a friend, I look down and notice that my friend was wearing Adidas slides as his shoes in the snow. It was fifteen-degrees outside and he was wearing shoes meant for the summer or the indoors. I was completely perplexed seeing that he was mostly wearing socks to cover his feet from the cold weather. When I asked him “Why are you wearing these shoes,” he responded by saying that he liked them. In this type of weather, his socks can easily get wet from snow and this can lead to frostbite. What added to this abnormality was that this friend of mine has about thirty other shoes that would be appropriate for the winter weather, but he choose not to wear any of those.

In fact, I believe that most people would think that this action is abnormal because it is violates a cultural norm and my moral consideration. The media and the culture around the United States promote different types of clothing for the different weather conditions. Large masses of people would adhere to the culture’s proper dress attire not just for fashion but also for comfort and the well-being of one’s self. In my opinion, it is very foolish to wear slides when there is snow and ice all over the floor. Slides do not have a strong grip at the bottom, thus one can easily slip, and they do not cover the top of the foot leaving the foot exposed to the cold. I found this attire very abnormal because the conceived normal attire for this type of weather is that one would wear boots, sneakers or some types of shoes that would fully cover one’s feet and keep them warm.

All of these experiences were abnormal to me based on a variety of perspectives.

Some of the experiences were abnormal because it went against statistical norms because the behavior or action was different from what the average amount of people would do. Other instances violated cultural norms and moral considerations because they were very different from what the normal standards are. Some observations proved to be dangerous from an evolutionary standpoint because one can be harmed. Nevertheless, some of the things I found abnormal may not be the case for others because they will have different views on cultural, social, and statistical norms. Abnormality and normality are distinctive to the observer.

Works Cited

Horwitz, Allan. 2008. “Normality.” Contexts 7 (Winter): 70-71.