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Soc 100: Introduction to Sociology

Source: “Coulrophobics Beware: America’s Creepy Clown Problem Continues”, Camila Domonoske, *NPR News,* October 6th, 2016.

The Clown Epidemic

As Halloween rolls around and people are getting into the spooky spirit, some are getting a little too into it. Lately, there have been several reported cases of people dressed in clown outfits that have been roaming about. For the most part, they seem to be just spooky figures that are meant to scare, but some have proven to be more serious than expected. Some clowns have killed, while others may be the ones who are killed as people stand up to the clowns. This phenomenon has created mass hysteria, making people even more afraid of clowns than they originally were. Not only is this affecting the public, but it also is influencing high schools, middle schools, and even elementary schools. Teenagers are trying to spread the fear of clowns in schools and have been arrested for doing so. A major part in spreading this hysteria is mass media, as it brings a way to easily spread the news of scary clowns to millions of people. Pictures are being circulated through multimedia and numerous reports have been sent out, further increasing the problem of clowns bringing fear to everyone. From what has been shown, it is very clear that there are three main sociological trends that are going on in this case: deviance, groups, and mass media.

The main point that is coming out of this phenomenon is deviance from society. Deviance is defined as, “a behavior, trait, belief, or other characteristic that violates a norm and causes a negative reaction.” (Ferris & Stein, 2014, p. 153). In this case, society is not used to scary clowns walking around as prominently in conventional society, which freaks them out. Most people in society think that clowns are terrifying to begin with, but when they show up in creepier masks with actual weapons, it raises a lot of concern for everyone. By dressing up like clowns and running around, people are getting a lot of attention, which could be a major reason behind why these individuals are doing this. Maybe it’s just the feeling of being different from everyone, partaking in a behavior that may feel fun by pushing against social norms. This is more prominent when people are doing it with others. Many want to rebel against society in groups because being with others lets people “share some attribute, identify with one another, and interact with each other.” (Ferris & Stein, 2014, p. 127). Members of groups feel like they belong to something that relates to them. In the case of the clowns, those who are in this group more than likely are doing this to just make things different in society, shaking it up to see what results they may get. For the most part, the clowns are just doing this to be creepy in more of a prank way, but it has gone too far with some. In these cases, those who are taking it too far may just be using the group to have an excuse for certain types of behavior and criminal acts. Wearing these clown masks creates anonymity, letting people scare others without having to show their face. In turn, it is a perfect way to commit crimes while most other clowns are just doing it to scare people.

In relation to mass media, many are likely to be getting the inspiration to do the clown movement in the first place because of not only the announcement of the “It” movie remake, but to get popular on the internet, as this topic is trending. It is well known that mass media makes us “internalize many of the values, beliefs, and norms” in relation to our society (Ferris & Stein, 2014, p. 113). When people are posting about clowns popping up and rebelling against society as deviants on mass media, a lot of people are influenced by this, either fearing it or becoming a part of it. The more popular it gets, the more people want to jump on board, as it will make them become more famous if they do this and get away with it. On the internet, it’s hard to stop a trend like this, as several media companies are just promoting it more by talking about it.

Personally, this movement is terrifying, as I hate clowns because of their untrustworthiness, hiding behind a false identity. It is typical for people to want to join into this, as there are those that want to be a part of something that is different; be a part of something that stands out. This is the case for many other social groups that are trying to overthrow social norms such as the Black Lives Matter movement, challenging our justice system for black Americans, and the example of the “Brony” community, being males that like a cartoon show that is meant for little girls, challenging gender roles and stereotypes. In both cases, there are people that are just in it to be a part of something that stands out, to say they are with a movement, which I feel may be more prominent in this case with the clowns. They are just wanting to be able to say they are a part of a group that is challenging norms in a joking way. I feel that it isn’t helping with our society’s nerves though, since it is freaking people out. I can’t even imagine how actual clowns are doing economically because of this, since that is their way of income. No one would want to hire a clown right now. I am hoping that it will be stopping soon, making our streets just a little safer then they are right now.

# References

Ferris, K., & Stein, J. (2014). *The Real World.* Canada: W. W. Norton.