Why’d Brian Do It? Essay, Research Paper

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Why’d Brian Do It?

When Stephanie Bassett arrived that day, what must she have felt? She couldn’t have been in the best of spirits. After all, three of her family members were dead and a fourth, her brother Brian, was charged with their murder. I sincerely doubt that Stephanie is a studied sociologist, but one question must have entered her mind,

“Why did Brian do it?”

Various sociological theories attempt to answer Stephanie’s question. One such micro-level theory is social control theory. Social control theory states that individuals develop emotional and cognitive bonds to conformity which serve as social controls. If these bonds are broken, deviance occurs. More simply, it says that a person becomes deviant the bonds are broken, and if they are unbroken he conforms. What are the bonds?

There are four types of bonds, they are attachment to conventional others, commitment to conventional behavior, involvement in conventional activities, and belief that rules should be followed. Social control theory would explain Brian’s crimes by pointing to the fact that one or more of his bonds must have been broken. For example, he obviously had broken attachment bond with his family. He must not have cared very much what about what they thought. He didn’t feel like he needed them. His commitment to conventional behavior would also have had to be broken considering his behavior. The article does not say, but one would suspect that he wasn’t involved in too many conventional activities. However, he did go to school. His belief in following rules would have to be in question also. How would another theory explain Brian’s behavior?

Differential association offers a different micro-level explanation. While social control theory assumes that people are naturally deviant and asks the question, “Why do people obey the rules of society?”, differential association asks, “Why do good people commit deviant acts?” Differential association would explain that through intimate personal groups Brian learned his deviant attitude and how to commit deviant acts. Through exposure deviance becomes the norm. There are four components to this theory also, they are frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.

Evidence for this theory is great in Brian’s case. From the article we know that he was drinking a lot and that he had a friend, Nicholaus McDonald, encouraging him in the deviant acts. Obviously, Brian was in with the wrong crowd. The questions differential association would ask how frequent his contacts were, how long they’d been in contact for, what priority he gave them, and how emotionally intense they were. For example, Brian gave higher priority to his friends than his family.

These two explanations are different in that social control assumes Brian is deviant and differential association assumes he is good but misguided. The theories both have good arguments, but very different conclusions. Did outside influences cause Brian’s deviance or was it the lack of bonds? It all depends on you’re point of view.