

Sociocultural explanations of schizophrenia

Labelling theory

1. Explain how labelling someone as 'schizophrenic' might result in their eventually behaving in an atypical way.
2. Using your prior learning, textbook or other sources, write a brief summary of the study by Rosenhan (1973).
3. A number of claims are commonly made about what Rosenhan's 'pseudopatients' study shows about the effects of labelling. These claims are worth examining critically. Discuss the following ideas in your group and decide how far you agree that Rosenhan's study shows...

...That psychiatrists can't distinguish between mentally ill and mentally well people.

...That giving people diagnostic labels causes them to be treated differently.

...That giving people diagnostic labels causes them to act differently.

...That the effects of labelling someone are difficult or impossible to reverse.

4. Seitz & Geske (1976) showed participants videotapes of children with learning difficulties. The participants rated the children on a number of dimensions. Sometimes the children were labelled 'mentally retarded' by the researchers and sometimes not. When the children had been labelled as 'mentally retarded', participants tended to rate them as more attractive and more likeable.

What does this study suggest about the effects of labelling people with diagnostic terms?

Family dysfunction

1. What does it mean to suggest that schizophrenia is a symptom of family dysfunction, not an individual pathology?
2. According to Bateson (1956), why do 'double binds' lead to the symptoms of schizophrenia?
3. Communications patterns are often disturbed in the families of schizophrenia patients. Does this show that Bateson was correct?
4. Studies of the families of recovering psychiatric patients sometimes show that as the patient recovers, relationships within the family deteriorate. How far does this support the family dysfunction theory?
5. Brown et al (1966) examined recovering schizophrenia patients returning to their families following release from hospital. Where the family was high in expressed emotion 58% of the patients were readmitted to hospital within 9 months. Where the family was low in expressed emotion 10% of patients were readmitted.

What implications does this study have for the causes and treatment of schizophrenia?

Essay questions

Describe and evaluate family dysfunction as an explanation of schizophrenia (12 marks).

Describe and discuss sociocultural explanations of schizophrenia (12 marks).