Culpable and non-culpable deviance:

A further distinction we can between different types of deviant behaviour is one that recognises the idea that there is a qualitative difference between people who commit deviant acts consciously (and with a full understanding of the fact they are behaving deviantly) and those whose deviant behaviour may, for example, be accidental or no fault of their own.Culpable deviance : refers to acts for which the individual perpetrator can be held personally accountable. They are, in short, acts of deviance committed by people in the knowledge that such acts are deviant. Examples here might include crimes such as murder, theft or violence, as well as a wide variety of non-criminal deviance.

non-culpable deviance : on the other hand, refers to acts for which the individual perpetrator is not held personally accountable. Examples of this type of non-culpable deviant behaviour might include deviant acts committed by:

1. People classified as “mentally ill”. In our society we recognise that the “mentally-ill” (however this is defined) cannot be held culpable for deviant actions since they are not considered to understand the values and norms of “normal” society.This, in effect, means that the mentally-ill are not punished, as such, for their deviance, although they may be required to undergo treatment for their “illness”.

2. Children. In our society. for example, the age of criminal responsibility varies for different forms of crime. It is, however, a general rule that children under the age of 10 cannot be held responsible for any criminal acts they commit. In terms of deviant behaviour, on the other hand, there are acts for which even very young children can be held responsible (for example, hitting another child).

3. Another category of non-culpable deviance might be people who fall into various categories of “behaviour” that are considered deviant because they do not conform to the norm in society. In this respect, the disabled are frequently treated as “deviant” even though, through no fault of their own, they are unable to participate fully in the social life and activities enjoyed by the ablebodied. Similarly, those which long-term illnesses or who have been “disfigured” in some way are often also included within this type of non-culpable categorisation.