**Godalming College**

Booklet Checked by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**Sociology Department**

INTERACTIONIST THEORIES OF CRIME & DEVIANCE: LABELLING



**WORKBOOK 3**

Crime and Deviance

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Name: | Set: | Group: |

### Deviance: Interactionist Explanations

**The Aim of this Unit:**

To introduce you to the contributions of writers adopting a broadly Interactionist Perspective to the analysis of Crime and Deviance.

**The Objectives of this Unit are to familiarise you with:**

**•** The outline and evaluation of the critique provided by Interactionism to our understanding of Functionalism, classical Marxism and other positivistic theories

• The social reactions to crime and deviance

• Evaluate the contribution of Labelling Theory to our understanding of crime and deviance

• Relate the contributions of key researchers such has Becker, Goffman, Lemert to the major concerns of these approaches.

**INTERACTIONIST THEORY**

Interactionist or action perspectives are normally considered to consist of a number of variations, namely:

• SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

• PHENOMENOLOGY

• ETHNOMETHODOLOGY.

Do some research, what is the difference between these three theories?

In general, interactionist perspectives tend to concentrate on relatively small-scale levels of social interaction (between individuals or within small social groups) and they are thus often referred-to as a "micro-sociological level of sociological analysis".

Their basic, common ideas are:

1. **ACTION** -Interactionists focus on the way in which individuals (or "social actors") act (that is, make conscious choices about their behaviour based upon the way they interpret situations) -rather than simply react to social stimulation. This contrasts with the positivist tradition, which focuses exclusively on people’s behaviour viewed as a consequence of “forces external to the individual” (whether genetic predisposition, anomie, capitalism, patriarchy or whatever).
2. **MEANING & INTERPRETATION** -The way that different social actors interpret the behaviour of others is significant as a means of understanding the way in which the world is socially constructed.

This "social construction" of the world is focused upon the meanings people give to behaviour and the way in which they interpret the meaning of behaviour.

Example: if we were standing at some traffic lights waiting to cross the road. If we see a car go through a red traffic signal, we may interpret that behaviour as "wrong" (because it is dangerous) and / or "illegal" (because it breaks the law).

If, however, the car that races through a red light has a flashing blue light and a wailing siren we may interpret that behaviour as "understandable", given that we assume the police officers in the car should have a good reason for acting both dangerously and illegally.

**Difference to Functionalism**

Unlike Functionalists who take the concept of consensus for granted and look at how that might break down into anomie, interactionists are concerned with the smaller scale processes by which we create and recreate meaning. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their key theoretical book “The Social Construction of Reality” refer to the nomos – the very opposite of anomie –the way in which each of us attempts to make sense of and give meaning to our worlds, our individual realities. Each of us constructs our own “universe of meaning” from which we ca an interpret the world around us. We are pattern making creatures, and without this it would be impossible to make sense of the world at all. We will revisit this in looking at the s sociology of Science later in the course.

**3. MEANING & CONTEXT** -The social context within which people interact is s significant for both their interpretation of the behaviour of others and the way they themselves choose to behave at any given time.

Examples: Swearing loudly may be acceptable if you are at home by yourself -or with someone who accepts the fact you swear on occasions -but may not be acceptable if, for example, you are teaching in a classroom – or indeed being a student in that classroom ...

**How Do Interactionists Study Deviance?**

In the first place, deviance is seen fundamentally as a quality of how we, as individuals, identify and **interpret** the social context of people's behaviour.

This idea is normally expressed as a process of labelling (hence the idea of "**Labelling Theory**".

Secondly, it must also be a quality of how we **react** to people's behaviour.

This idea is normally expressed as the "**social reaction**" to behaviour.

As **Bilton** et al ("Introductory Sociology") note:

"**We need to ask why is it that behaviour in some contexts and engaged in by some people comes to be defined and processed as "criminal", while other behaviour and actors experienced no such labelling**?".

## LABELLING THEORY

The main basis of labelling theories of crime and deviance is the idea that, in order to understand these social phenomena, we have, as sociologists, to take account not simply of what people do or do not do (behaviour) but also, more importantly, the **social context** of that behaviour.

In this respect, we are dealing with such questions as:

How behaviour is interpreted (and by whom)

Why it is interpreted in particular ways at different times.

**Methodologically**, since questions about "how" and "why" behaviour is interpreted inevitably involves **subjective judgements** (both on the part of the participants and sociologists who gather data through interpretive methods - such as overt / covert observation, unstructured interviews and so forth), this form of sociology is frequently referred to as "**subjective sociology**".

In terms of "theoretical explanations of deviance", labelling theory is significant because it **switches the focus of attention** away from trying to find "causes of crime" in people's behavioural background (**what you do**) onto the location of behaviour within a **subjective social context**, whereby the most significant variable involved is **how people react to what you do** or, in many instances, do not do).

For labelling theorists, therefore, the "causes of crime" are to be found not in the qualities possessed by "deviants and criminals" but, rather, in the **patterns of social interaction** that exist in any social group, institution or society.

Although "**crime**" is an **objective social category**, insofar as we can measure it by reference to the existence of law (if you break the law then you are technically a criminal), the idea of "**criminality**" is rather-more of a **subjective category** - mainly because it is dependent upon the social reaction to the behaviour of the "law-breaker".

For Labelling theorists, therefore, understanding criminality involves a dual process, namely:

**Behaviour** and the **Social Reaction** to that behaviour.

It is because of this subjective element of "social reaction" that, according to such theorists, it is not possible to understand the former without taking account of the latter - they are, in effect, two sides of the same coin. In order to understand crime and, more importantly, the process of criminalization, therefore, it is evident that we must look at such things as:

**The law makers**

Who makes laws and why are laws made?

**The law-breakers**

In particular, the social reaction to people's behaviour.

**The law enforcers**

That is, the role of the police, courts, etc. in the labelling process. In addition, the role of the mass media, moral entrepreneurs and so forth will be important in relation to both definitions of law breaking (social reaction) and law enforcement (this idea will be developed further when we look at Deviancy Amplification).

**The Community** (the "**general public**"):

Again, since the social reaction from the "general public" tends to be articulated through the mass media.

Where Functionalists, for example, assume that laws - and the moral values upon which they are based - are somehow absolute (based upon fundamental, deeply-held values - or "mores"), Interactionists argue that all behaviour - and hence all systems of law - is morally relative.

Make a 5 point summary of pages 2 to 4 to explain the approach of Interactionists to study crime

**Labelling theory** is associated primarily with the work of Howard S Becker, Edwin Lemert, Erving Goffmann.

**HOWARD BECKER**

Argues that central questions for study of deviance are

1. the processes of labelling and the deviant career - how are people labelled and what consequences follow
2. the process of law creation - how have certain acts come to be defined as deviant

Labelling theory should be familiar from the Sociology of Education and the work of Becker, Ball, etc.

The emphasis here is on the importance and variability of meanings attached to actions which may be labelled “deviant”.

**“Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance ...” Howard Becker**

In this quotation (given more fully in Haralambos) Becker implies that there is no such thing as an inherently deviant act - only acts which are labelled deviant. It is the audience of any particular act which create deviance by the application of the label, and the success of their application of the label will depend upon their power to do so.

**“The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label.” Howard Becker**

It is in the process of labelling that deviance is created - Becker is interested in the process of labelling and the consequences of that labelling process for the “deviant”.

**“Deviance is not a simple quality present in some kinds of behaviour and absent in others. [It} is not a quality that lies in the behaviour itself, but in the interaction between those who commit acts and those who respond to them.” HSB**

Here Becker echoes the distinction made by Lemert regarding primary and secondary deviation.

**[Deviance is ...] “a consequence of a process of interaction between people, some of whom in the service of their own interest make and enforce rules which catch others, who in the service of their own interests have committed acts which are labelled deviant.” HSB**

In this sense, labelling theory is always concerned with issues of power, and the attractiveness of the theory is clear to conflict structuralist and especially neo-marxist theorists.

## The labelling process

**EDWIN LEMERT**

Lemert makes a very useful distinction between primary and secondary deviation

1. **Primary deviation** - deviant acts before they are so labelled  
   *Interactionists argue that there is not much of use that can be said about this by sociologists - the only thing that publicly labelled ”deviants” have in common is that they all have been caught - and some actions labelled deviant might be very, very common indeed*.
2. **Secondary deviation** - the response of the individual or the group concerned to societal reaction  
   *The principal focus of interactionist studies*

**“In effect the original ‘causes’ of the deviance recede and give way to the central importance of the disapproving, degradational, and isolating reactions of society.” EL**

**AARON CICOUREL**

* Police officers’ decisions to arrest are influenced by their stereotypes about offenders.
* Officers’ typifications led them to concentrate on certain ‘types’.
* This resulted in law enforcement that showed class bias- working class people most closely fit the typificiations.
* This led to more focus on policing these areas, which in turn to more arrests confirming the stereotype.
* In his view justice is not fixed but negotiable, for example if a middle class youth was arrested they would be less likely to be charged.
* *Can you think of any recent examples in the media that would help support this argument?*

**ERVING GOFFMANN**

Study of Asylums as total institutions - especially concerned with the way that such institutions force their definitions of their inmates onto them through techniques of **mortification** including induction procedures and rigid control of behaviour

**“In the mental hospital, the setting and the house rules press home to the patient that he is, after all, a mental case who has suffered from some kind of social collapse on the outside, having failed in some over-all way, and that here he is of little social weight, being hardly capable of acting like a fully-fledged person at all.” EG**

Exit from the mental hospital is marked by anxiety, and for some the effects of institutionalization are extreme.

Problems faced in entry to the outside world involve

1. **disculturation** - learning new (or old) habits to survive in the new environment and
2. **the effects of the label** - “ex-mental patient”, “ex-convict”, etc.

Argues that treatment institutions in general reinforce rather than reduce deviance.

## Criticisms

**Despite the challenging approach of labelling theory, there are a number of serious criticisms:**

1. There is a tendency to over-romanticise accounts of deviance, which in their concern for the 'underdog' can distort the reality of crime; some of it is pretty nasty.
2. There is a concentration on marginal forms of deviance. There is no analysis of crimes such as offences against property. **Young (1975)** says of labelling: **'Indeed it is engaged in an astonishing accomplishment the development of a criminology that does not deal with property crime, and a criminology whose subjects live in a world not of work but of leisure.'**
3. There is a disregard for the origins of deviant behaviour. Hence it is claimed, too much emphasis is placed on the impact of social reaction and thus on the deviants present as opposed to their past.
4. They over-simplify the process of labelling, and particularly they minimise the role of the deviant in the defining process. Deviants come across as passive victims. The degree of choice and consciousness that actors have is denied them. We cannot rule out the possibility that deviants choose to continue their behaviour because they find it rewarding.
5. If labelling is so straightforward, then it should be more uniform in its effects. Not only should it always produce negative consequences, but also such consequences should only occur because of the application of the label. **But is this the case? Surely the application of the label can result in a decrease in deviant behaviour?** Similarly, others can take on a deviant identity and manifest all the features of secondary deviance without any public labelling occurring.
6. Labelling has been criticised for failing to analyse the structures of power and interest at work in the making of laws and the definitions of 'criminal' and 'deviant'. They raise questions of power but don’t have a structurally based critique. They tend to concentrate on middle level agencies of social control such as the police and the courts.

**OVERVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF LABELLING THEORY FOR SOCIOLOGISTS IN RELATION TO CRIME AND DEVIANCE**

This short summary intends to explain the importance of the interaction between an individual who commits a deviant act and those who have ………… …………………….to label the individual as deviant. It will explore the consequences of negatively labelling an individual.

The distinctive perspective provided by labelling theorists stems from a fundamental criticism of traditional \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_criminology. They maintain that the positivist perspective involves (often incorrect) assumptions about the nature of crime and deviance, and about their explanation. Such theories present their subject matter as straightforward, easily identifiably, and more or less black and white.

Rather than pursuing the causes of crime, labelling theorists analyse the social processes by which the behaviour of some individuals comes to be labelled as officially criminal; they look at consequences and implications for these individuals. Traditional criminology, despite occasionally recognising the inadequacies of official figures on crime, proceeded as if it were dealing with a representative section of criminals, and not recognising the fact that official statistics constitute a socially defined population, publicly labelled as 'criminal'.

One of the most influential statements in relation to crime and deviance is that of Howard S. Becker: "*Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying these rules to particular people and labelling them as “\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_* ". Becker claims there is no such thing as deviance - an act only becomes deviant when it is so labelled. Labelling is therefore merely a reaction by a social \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_to produce a sense of order in social relations. Becker gives an example of a brawl involving young people, in a low income area - the police may class this as being evidence of delinquency, whereas in a high income area they are more likely to see it as being 'youthful high spirits'. Those who observe an act of deviance may view it one way, whereas those who commit the act may view it differently. If people are labelled as deviant by those in a position to make the label stick, such as the police, then they become deviants.

Becker argues that deviance is not the quality of the behaviour of a person, but depends on the interaction between the person and the observer. The attachment of a deviant label has important effects on how individuals are perceived, how they perceive themselves, and the resulting patterns of interaction between them and others. These have important implications in relation to crime and deviance.

After someone is caught and branded as a deviant a process of 'stigmatisation' occurs: this involves the re-evaluation of one's public identity by others. The new status makes it increasingly difficult for an individual to retain his normal identity. The label, through its stereotyping effect, over-simplifies what the deviant 'is', and so the labelled individual is seen as nothing but what his/her label suggests. It is, rather than simply a label, a ‘\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’, which may override a man's status as a father, neighbour, or workmate. He will be associated with the negative qualities and characteristics normally linked with the label given to him, and will start to see himself in terms of the label. As Rock says, 'a deviant role is not just another role in a varied repertoire; it is a critical and revealing guide to a deviant personality'. Imagine, for example, someone who has been caught stealing a few times and sent to a detention centre - he is branded as a 'thief' in the eyes of the law and the public. Now, despite the fact that he may have reformed, and has full intentions to get and find a job to lead a 'straight' life, he must still carry his label around with him. It is likely that he will be constantly rebuffed, despite any attempts to prove that he has changed. In this way he will be thrown back, as it were, to stealing, and therefore 'confirm' his deviant inclinations. Therefore, the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_effect of the label places deviants outside conventional circles and sparks off a sense of uncertainty in them. A ‘\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’ occurs, resulting in a warped self-image. The 'deviant identification becomes the controlling one', and so deviants come to live up to the label. He sees himself in terms of the label, since one's \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_is usually derived from how others see you.

It is important, according to Lemert, to recognise the difference between …………………… and …………………………deviance, of which the labelling theorists are concerned with the latter. Primary deviance comprises the widespread acts of deviance in which we all engage some time in our lives, but which do not in most cases lead to public labelling. Lemert and other labelling theorists are not particularly interested in why individuals become involved in such activities for several reasons. For example, there may be a variety of motivations and circumstances for primary deviance: a search for 'kicks', desire for gain or risk-taking perhaps. Also primary deviance is unlikely to impact strongly on ……… ……………..... ……………… ……………. in any way. It is only when the social reactions in the form of public labelling occur that problems come out. Such a process may create several problems for deviants, forcing them to embark on a 'secondary' deviance.

Indeed, the rise of labelling perspectives has played a very important role in the study of crime and deviance. The labelling theorists raised several issues that have not been touched upon before: the problematic nature of the phenomenon of 'crime' and ignoring the process of interaction involved in defining as criminal', by accepting the official definition of crime; and the stress on the role of power in………. ………………... ……………… All of these have become very important issues to sociologists in relation to crime and deviance.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| * stigmatising | * self-concept | * outsiders | * 'master-status' |
| * 'secondary' | * audience | * positivist | * 'primary' |
| * the power | * 'self-fulfilling prophecy' | * an individual's self-image | * the defining process |

**Activity: Use this framework as a summary of the contribution made by Interactionism- use this booklet, textbooks, class discussion and your notes**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Issue** | **Comment** |
| How the theory defines deviance |  |
| Historical background of the theory |  |
| **Key Concepts associated with the theory** |  |
| 1 |  |
| 2 |  |
| 3 |  |
| 4 |  |
| 5 |  |
| **Key Studies associated with the theory** |  |
| 1 |  |
| 2 |  |
| 3 |  |
| 4 |  |
| Value given to Official Statistics |  |
| **General Evaluation Points** |  |
| 1 |  |
| 2 |  |
| 3 |  |
| 4 |  |
| **Perspective Evaluation** |  |
| Functionalism |  |
| Feminism |  |
| New Right |  |
| Strain Theories |  |
| Social Policy Implications |  |

SYNOPTIC LINKS WITH AREAS OF SOCIOLOGY YOU HAVE ALREADY STUDIED

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Issue** | **Links up to** | **Supporting study / Theory** |
| **Education** |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Family** |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Methods** |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| **Other** |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**Exam Practice**

* Outline two ways individuals might be labelled [4 marks]
* Outline two ways in which crime and deviance are socially constructed [4 marks]
* Outline three consequences of labelling [6 marks]
* Outline two criticisms of labelling theory [10 marks]

Item: Labelling theorists argue that an act is not inherently criminal; it only becomes so when it is labelled as such. They are interested in the ways that labelling affects the actions of those with the power to label acts as criminal, such as the police and courts. Being labelled can also have important effects on individuals whom the label is attached, and labelling a group as criminal can even lead to higher rates of crime being recorded.

* Applying material from the item, analyse two effects of the labelling process on individuals and groups [10 marks]

Item: Rather than look for the initial cause of the deviant act, as functionalists do, labelling theorists ask how any why some groups and acts come to be labelled as criminal or deviant while others do not. Coming from an interactionist perspective, they argue that what we mean by crime or deviance is the outcome of the same processes of social interaction- between police officer and suspect, for example- as any other social behaviour. Therefore to understand crime and deviance, we must grasp the meanings involved in the interaction.

* Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the contribution of labelling theory to our understanding of crime and deviance [30 marks]

**Essay plan: Interactionism and crime**

Item: Rather than look for the initial cause of the deviant act, as functionalists do, labelling theorists ask how any why some groups and acts come to be labelled as criminal or deviant while others do not. Coming from an interactionist perspective, they argue that what we mean by crime or deviance is the outcome of the same processes of social interaction- between police officer and suspect, for example- as any other social behaviour. Therefore to understand crime and deviance, we must grasp the meanings involved in the interaction.

**Applying material from the item and your knowledge, evaluate the contribution of labelling theory to our understanding of crime and deviance [30 marks]**

Paragraphs in 20 and 30 mark essays:

The Sociology sandwich is exactly the same as the burger idea we use for 10 marker, but it needs you to include more analysis/evaluation (using other studies, theories or methodology) to counter the point you are making. Each paragraph should have the elements of this ‘sandwich’ before you move onto your next point.



**Key areas of the question that you need to address:**

|  |
| --- |
| What does the question want? |
| **Introduction:** needs to address the debate and define key concepts in the question. Provide a brief overview of labelling approaches i.e. that they explain reactions to deviance but not the cause |
| How could you use the **item** |
| What key concepts will need to be included? |
| **Para 1: Outline the view of Becker, what does he contribute to our understanding of crime, what is he missing?** |
| **Para 2: Outline another view, compare to Becker, what does it contribute, what is it missing?** |
| **Para 3: Outline another view, compare to previous views, what does it contribute, what is it missing?** |
| **If you have time - Para 4: Outline another view, compare to previous views, what does it contribute, what is it missing?** |
| **Para 5: evaluation – add in any additional problems with the theory from the point of view of functionalists (and if possible Marxists) – this is an essential paragraph** |
| **Conclusion- weigh up the debate: based on the evidence you have presented, does labelling theory really help us understand crime and deviance?** |

**50:50 Extension Tasks**

To help reinforce your learning and understanding in A-Level Sociology it is important to go beyond the set homework. Knowledge only stays in our heads if it is regularly reinforced and built upon. These tasks will help you do so. It is up to you what you do as people learn in different ways but it is important that you spend the same time on your work as you do in lessons, so 50:50

Tasks:

* Practice short questions from the end of the booklet and from throughout the textbooks.
* Plan and write an essay.
* Undertake additional reading to reinforce your understanding and develop your notes:

Browne, ‘Sociology for AQA Volume 2’, pp.459-463

Haralambos and Holborn, ‘Sociology Themes and Perspectives’, 8th edition, pp.361-367

Webb, ‘AQA A Level Sociology, Book Two’, pp.79-84 – do the questions and activities in the booklet as you go.

* Create a quizlet or Kahoot for the different theories https://quizlet.com/en-gb <https://kahoot.com/>
* Write the key concepts (which can be found in the booklet) as flashcards or as a quizlet.