

Labeling Theory

a critical examination

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Johannes Knutsson

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PREFACE

This study has been made on behalf of the Scientific Reference Group of the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. It was carried out in two parts, of which the first, a theoretical review, came in the summer of 1975. But as a theoretical examination is not sufficient to give an idea of how much weight a theory will bear, I was asked to investigate and see how well founded the labeling approach is empirically. The second part of my examination was made in the spring of 1976. This second part is probably more accessible to readers, and it can be read separately.

Labeling theory has become very popular. It has reached a great number of people and been widely accepted as an explanation for criminal and other deviant behavior. As a theory of this kind provides a certain view of reality, such acceptance means that the approach has lain behind many contributions to discussion and to some extent it has influenced criminal and social policy. When a good theory is adopted it offers favorable opportunities for constructive action. With a bad theory, on the other hand, the results can be unfortunate.

Labeling theory implies a policy of non-intervention: nothing should be done since taking measures would only make the situation worse. This calls into question the activities and very existence of the police, youth-welfare committees and National Prison and Probation Administration; the results of their work are held to run directly counter to their respective aims.

However, an examination of the labeling approach reveals that, regarded as a theory, it contains much weakness and also has a poor empirical foundation. To build a program of action on such a theory would necessarily

be a hazardous undertaking. If we follow a policy of not intervening, it may not produce at all the favorable effects which the theory would lead us to expect; on the contrary, the problems involved may only be aggravated. We would risk, into the bargain, being deprived of opportunities to solve the problem in a purposeful manner.

In various ways, criminal and other asocial behavior gives rise to social distress, and curtailment of this must be our aim. To achieve it, the difficulty may perhaps be not that we go too far, but that we fail to go far enough.

Stockholm, November 1976

Johannes Knutsson

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SUMMARY

Since the theoretical labeling approach appeared at the beginning of the Sixties, it has exerted very great influence both on discussion about criminal and other deviant behavior and on the view people take .

Two sociologists are usually mentioned as forerunners of the approach: Tannenbaum and Mead.

Tannenbaum is best known for his "dramatization of evil" concept. That term denotes the process whereby the definition of certain behavior as evil is extended to include the individual involved - he, too, is characterized as evil.

Mead was a pioneer of symbolic interactionism. In the view of this school, self-awareness is created in the individual through interplay between him and his environment. He is treated in a certain way, as a person with certain characteristics, and by accepting the image of himself thus conveyed he acquires a self-concept. We may say that the basis on which a person gains experience of himself as someone with a certain identity is his ability to see himself through the eyes of others.

Mead distinguished two aspects present in this self-awareness: "me" and "I". "Me" is a social product and consists essentially of the image conveyed by the societal environment. It is through "I" that the individual integrates the environment's view of him. This "I" represents the person's conduct and has a biological foundation. While "me" can be predicted by charting the individual's environment and establishing the way in which he is treated by it, "I" is impulsive and creative, representing what is spontaneous and unpredictable in the individual.

The labeling theorists have concerned themselves with the socially-determined "me" in self-awareness. Seen from that standpoint, the person's self-concept is a result of how he has been treated and of the expectations placed upon him.

The labeling approach cannot be regarded as constituting a well-integrated theory. Rather, its advocates have taken a common viewpoint in analyzing criminal behavior. Among the best-known names in the field are Becker, Lemert, Scheff and Goffman. In Sweden, Lundén and Näsman have published contributions.

The theoretical survey which follows takes in descriptions of various central concepts and assumptions. I try thereafter to establish whether the labeling theorists have been logical and consistent in their presentation and to analyse the consequences of their assumptions. This analysis is carried out on the premise that the labeling perspective may be regarded as constituting a theory. A certain arbitrariness is present in my choice of the principal conceptions and suppositions described; it is caused for one thing by the complexity of the approach. The rule has been applied, however, that attention should be given to what is considered typical of the perspective.

The Theory

Labeling theory holds that on some occasion everybody shows behavior that can be called deviant. For various reasons, only certain people are labeled as deviant because of this behavior. Labeling entails that the identity assigned to an individual is in some respect altered to his discredit. Certain qualities connected with the behavior are attributed to him. The behavior which becomes the object of labeling is called the primary deviation. Essentially, two effects come from labeling. On the one hand, an individual's social situ-

ation is changed; on the other, his self-image. He begins to conceive of himself as a deviant. The two factors together give rise to deviant careers in which the individual little by little enters a deviant way of life. Finally, he has developed a deviant identity. He has become what people have said he was from the start. Behavior which results from labeling is known as secondary deviance.

The Definition of Deviant Behavior

Deviant behavior is behavior which is so labeled. According to the labeling theorists, what constitutes deviant behavior is fundamentally the reaction of the environment. No reaction, no deviant behavior.

By that definition, norm-violating behavior which is not labeled as such is not deviant. Here a problem arises, for the kind of reaction that would identify deviant behavior is not stated. Ultimately, the consequence of the labeling theorists' definition is that it deprives an individual's actions of moral and social meaning. It is only from a subsequent reaction that his action acquires meaning for him.

The Primary Deviation

This arises for a number of different reasons. But the causes are not of interest to the theorists. It is assumed that actions of everybody can now and then be described as deviant. Analysis starts from after the primary deviation. The deviation itself is taken for granted.

As result of this, labeling theory proceeds on the assumption that in actual fact no people exist who are motivated to behave deviantly or who possess certain qualities which drive them to do so.

Labeling

This means that certain negative qualities are ascribed to people. The labeling may come from those closest in the individual's environment, from other social groups and finally from within the individual himself.

Deviant Careers

Labeling entails an altered social situation and a transformed self-image. Together, these factors give rise to deviant careers with ever-increasing involvement in deviant behavior.

Howard Becker and Edwin Lemert have carried out studies of two different deviant types of careers.

Becker has studied how a steady use of marihuana is established. He lists various conditions which must be fulfilled if such use is to arise. One of these is the user's belief that he can conceal his marihuana smoking from his environment. Another is his ability to neutralize popular stereotypes about drug-takers. Here, by implication Becker is claiming that labeling exerts a deterrent effect since, when labeling does occur, in order to be a user the person must be capable of neutralizing the perception of drug-addicts conveyed through the labeling. Thus, there are contradictions in Beckers's views about labeling and its effects.

Lemert has studied systematic check-forgers. Such a forger carries out his crimes while using a pseudonym. His social situation produces an identity problem. In order to solve it, the forger acts in such a way that he gets caught. His criminal identity is confirmed by this. Lemert thus suggests that no labeling occurred before the forger's criminal career began but only afterwards. The conclusion is that these two studies contradict the claim that labeling is of decisive importance in the genesis of deviant careers.

The Deviant Identity

When the individual is treated as having certain qualities which are attached to the stigma conveyed through labeling, his identity is transformed and becomes deviant. The labeling process therefore gives rise to a "self-fulfilling prophecy".

It is unclear, however, what the term "deviant identity" really means. Sometimes usage gives the impression that such identity is unequivocally determined by those who label the individual. At other times it seems to originate as a kind of defence against what is imputed to him. When he turns to a group where others are also labeled, he forms a self-image which has its source in the "anti-ideology" created by that deviant group. The labeling theorists have not made it clear whether in cases of this kind they regard the self-image as being totally of social determination, nor have they made it plain from what source they believe that the deviant self-image comes.

Secondary Deviation

Labeling increases the likelihood of continued deviant behavior.

Conversely, this implies that if labeling did not take place deviant behavior would remain on the "primary level". But we cannot say that there is a fixed level of primary deviance because the deviation becomes primary on being labeled, and labeling leads in turn to secondary deviance. Should the interpretation not be as follows? Without labeling there would exist only norm-violating behavior, which is understood to be more or less free of problems.

Regarded as a theory, then, the labeling approach is inconsistent. It contains a number of assumptions that must be deemed unclear and dubious.

The approach of the labeling theorists has nevertheless had great power and won considerable ground. This may perhaps be due to its providing a simple and attractive solution to a difficult ethical dilemma.

Since the deviant's behavior is caused by the reaction of his environment, he is without responsibility for it. Actually, the societal environment is the villain of the piece as it is in a sense responsible for his behavior. Furthermore, no steps should be taken because of the behavior since they would only make matters worse. This attitude offers an escape from the necessity of making an unpleasant decision about a potential intervention against the deviant.

Yet the existence of a given theoretical tradition does not only mean that it explains some central phenomenon; it may fulfill other functions as well. There are certain socio-legal elements in the labeling perspective and these have opened the way for criminology of the kind proceeding from a conflict perspective. Moreover, the "existentialist" vein discernible in the labeling approach has enabled researchers oriented toward scientific behaviorism to discuss issues of general prevention.

A theoretical review of a theory is not sufficient to give a conception of the weight it will bear. This requires empirical testing. However, it is impossible to test a theory which contains inconsistencies. A feasible procedure under these circumstances is to choose one interpretation of the theory and see what support exists for it.

The interpretation chosen here is the most "popular". But it does not differ appreciably from the version of

the labeling theory presented by Lundén and Näsman, its leading Swedish advocates.

According to this interpretation, everybody violates the law now and then. But control agencies of the criminal justice system so function that they methodically select and label individuals of lower social status. Thus, for comparable misdeeds people from a lower social class are more extensively labeled than those from a higher social group. Labeling entails a transformed self-image and an altered social situation. Together, these changes lead to deviant careers. Labeling therefore increases the likelihood of continued criminal behavior.

Three hypotheses can be considered central to the theory. The first is that a systematic selection occurs such that persons with low social status are selected for labeling. The second is that labeling gives rise to an altered self-image and the third is that labeling increases the probability of continued criminal behavior.

In testing the theory the point of departure here is a bibliography of published contributions to the labeling perspective. In all, 427 articles from different scientific journals are included. Of these articles, 128 have been taken from seven large reviews. Over seventy are considered to be empirical studies. However, a great many of these have to do with psychiatric issues. Some twenty are used to throw light on how well founded, empirically, the labeling theory is. They have been supplemented with other information.

As for the selection hypothesis, it may be said that American studies included in the material do not support the idea that social status accounts for legal intervention (labeling) better than do the infractions committed. On the other hand, some investigations do reveal a tendency toward severer measures against individuals from lower social groups.

As Swedish society differs in many respects from American society, I have also gone through some Swedish studies. These do not support the idea of a social selection. But two reservations must be made. The Swedish investigations concern only young people - and data on the actions of the authorities concerned is not entirely adequate.

From one study's findings there does seem to be a tendency for those labeled to have images of themselves as criminals. However, this does not necessarily indicate a causal connection between labeling and a criminal self-image. It is most active criminals who get caught and thereby labeled. Consequently, in the study mentioned previous criminality is not held constant. To be able to say whether a causal connection exists, we must be able to compare two groups, one labeled and the other not, with similar levels of criminality.

It is probably difficult to test the hypothesis that labeling leads to continued criminal activity. But having regard to the information from criminal statistics, the idea that labeling always leads to new offences may be rejected. If the thesis were correct, none of those labeled would ever cease to violate the law. Yet when offenders are divided up according to age we find no recidivism for the great majority of young people who have been in trouble with the police.

A more plausible way of putting the hypothesis would be to say that labeling increases the likelihood of continued offences. This probability can be elucidated by means of the statistics on recidivists. According to the labeling theory, prison sentences should lead to relapses in most cases. However, among first offenders convicted of other than minor offences recidivism is no greater for those sent to prison than for those put on probation. This renders less convincing the hypothesis that labeling increases the likelihood of continued criminal conduct.

As final judgement, then, the theory may be said to stand on an extremely weak foundation. Very few studies are available which deal with the central hypotheses of the theory. This paucity goes hand in hand with the anti-positivist attitude of the labeling theorists. If the theory is to prove fruitful its concepts must be better analysed and defined. This applies particularly to labeling itself, as that concept plays such a dominant part in the theory. The theorists need to state under what conditions a certain type of labeling has a specified kind of effect. The question must be raised as to whether labeling always acts to strengthen deviant behavior in some way, for labeling may be expected to have a deterrent effect as well. The theoretical work must be followed up by empirical studies if the theory is to make a contribution to analyses of criminal and other deviant behavior.

PART I

A THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theoretical labeling approach is made up of works published mainly from the 1960's onward. The names usually mentioned in this connection are those of Lemert, Becker, Scheff and Goffman. In Sweden, Borglind, Lundén and Näsman have published contributions on the labeling approach. The approach cannot be said to comprise a very coherent theory; rather, these writers have proceeded from some common points of departure when analyzing deviant behavior. To put the matter briefly: in their discussions of deviance they focus on the reactions of the social environment and its control agencies to behavior described as deviant; as well as on how these reactions affect the individuals who are considered to be deviant.

Frank Tannenbaum and George Herbert Mead are customarily named as forerunners of the school. Tannenbaum is best known for his "dramatization of evil" concept. This covers a process of "tagging, defining, identifying, segregating, describing, emphasizing, making conscious and selfconscious..." (Tannenbaum, 1938: in Rubington & Weinberg, 1968; p. 18.) When the behavior of individuals has been defined as evil, that definition is transferred to the individuals themselves: they are described as evil. According to Tannenbaum, measures taken against them by the community through its control agencies have a result opposite to that intended. "The harder they (the control agencies) work to reform the evil, the greater the evil grows under their hands." (*Idem*)

Mead is the founder of symbolic interactionism which provides the labeling perspective with one of its cornerstones. Since he is considered such a central figure in this context, it may be of value to describe some of his principal ideas. Now, it is true that many of his fundamental concepts are included in the conceptual apparatus of sociology and social psychology and are

more or less common knowledge. But his presentation of them is rather complex, even at times ambiguous. It can thus be of interest to describe his ideas in some detail. The variety of their meaning has caused different scholars and researchers to concern themselves with separate aspects of his social psychology - as will be evident in the following resumé. The aim here is to sort out the interpretations and direct attention to his premises. The account is based on his classic work, Mind, Self and Society. (Mead, 1934)¹

¹When this study was begun I had not as yet read Mead in the original, but I believed that his work might be a good starting-point. I also felt (a presentment which has been confirmed) that his symbolic interactionism has been depleted by the labeling theorists. While reading Mead, I was captivated by the exposition of his ideas, and this may cause me to give him excessive space here. However, my hope is that an effect of contrast will appear between him and representatives of the labeling perspective to be examined.

2.1 Brief Description of the Theory

A fundamental line of thought for Mead is that consciousness - mind - arises and is developed through a communication process taking place in a social context. Mind is thus temporally preceded by a social process. The interaction occurs mainly by means of vocal expressions (language), the most important ones being "significant symbols". A symbol is described as significant when it arouses one and the same idea in various individuals. A person grasps the meanings by unconsciously placing himself in the position of others and acting as they do. As Mead puts it, we assume the attitude of the other in our behavior. By attitude Mead means the beginning of an action that later results, or can result, in complete and observable conduct. An attitude probably entails that in this process certain values direct the person toward an object in the external world. Those values will determine his behavior as he performs that particular action. (P.5)² An individual can assume the other's attitude by his ability to look back on the entire social process, including everybody who has taken part, and to turn the experience in toward himself. This he does through "reflectiveness", which in Mead's view is a basic condition for the development of mind.

It is when a person has crystallized the specific attitudes of others toward him into one attitude, the attitude of the "generalized others", that universal and impersonal thinking appears. By thinking Mead means that an object can be experienced as having different

Here and in what follows, page references to Mead's Mind, Self and Society are given by themselves. With other authors the work is always indicated by date of publication, "Ibid.", etc. Titles can also be found in the Bibliographies, separate for the two parts of this work.

values; in other words, that there may be multiple ways of acting toward the same object. What particularly distinguishes human thinking is precisely the ability to isolate values and their relations to an object: this is what constitutes mind.

"The man holds on to these different possibilities of response in terms of the different stimuli which present themselves, and it is his ability to hold them there that constitutes his mind." (P.124)

According to Mead, language plays an altogether fundamental role in human thinking, and it bestows on man his unique ability to master his environment. By means of language man is capable of singling out and isolating different aspects of an object in the external world and of conveying these to his fellow-men. Nevertheless, language and the mental process it entails are not confined to the human organism; rather, they should be seen as a kind of process relating organism and environment. (P.133)

The development of self is similar to that of mind. As with mind, it becomes established through a process of social interaction yet it remains inseparably linked with the evolution of mind.

It is by taking the attitude of others toward himself, and making himself an object to himself, that a person conceives of himself as an individual with his own identity. This means that he does so indirectly, through the attitudes of the group to which he belongs. Consequently, the basis on which an individual experiences himself as a subject is his ability to make himself into an object. (P.138)

Actual construction of the self takes place in childhood, in games and make-believe where the child plays various roles. Full self-consciousness is developed here, for to participate successfully the child must be able to assume the attitudes of all who join in.

The individual's personality does not, meanwhile, consist of one static self. It is made up of a set corresponding to a variety of situations - to, in Mead's term, social reactions. Moreover, the self alters constantly, changing in accordance with what the individual experiences in different social contexts.

An integrated self - that is self-awareness - is acquired, when a person takes over the attitude of the "generalized others". Only then, in Mead's view, when that attitude is allowed to determine behavior in a social situation, does a person become an organic member of the community. He then assumes the community's moral attitudes. It should be noted, however, that Mead does not use the concept of "generalized others" in an entirely clear-cut way.³ Sometimes he allows it to represent the community as a whole, at others a part of the community, at still others a limited social group. Furthermore, it seems to refer to different aspects of the self: to the source of self-awareness and also to that from which the moral part of the self derives. One way of interpreting Mead here is to suppose that when he lets the generalized others represent the total community he is speaking of society's moral norms and thereby also the moral aspect of the self.

"Those attitudes (as organized sets of responses) must be there on the part of all, so that when one says such a thing he calls out in himself the response of what I have called the generalized others. That which makes society possible is such common responses, such organized attitudes, with reference to what we term property, the cults of religion, the process of education and the relations of the family." (P.161)

In this quotation we thus have the generalized others allude to society's system of norms. Some support for

³ Perhaps it should be mentioned, too, that Mead did not himself write the book in question. It is made up of notes taken and compiled by his students.

the interpretation that when Mead permits the generalized others to represent the total society he refers to society's moral norms, is gained from his view of the offender. According to Mead, the criminal is:

"...the individual who lives in a very small group, and then makes depredations upon the larger community of which he is not a member. He is taking the property that belongs to the community that recognizes and preserves the rights of property." (P. 265).

A criminal is consequently an incompletely socialized being, an individual in whose self the attitude of the generalized others has not been incorporated. Or one might put the matter like this: he is a differently socialized being and his generalized others have different moral attitudes.

As it is suggested by the quotation given, Mead exerted considerable influence on the criminology of the Chicago school.⁴ Shaw and McKay have claimed, in their Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas for instance, that life in "delinquent areas" is characterized by a differential organization. This implies that people in such areas are governed by "unconventional" values. (Shaw & McKay, 1969; pp. 170-189).

This in turn means, expressed in accordance with Mead's conceptual framework, that the people in such areas are characterized by "deviant" generalized others, in relation to the conventional community. A similar influence can likewise be noted in Sutherland's theory of differential association. In the fifth section for instance of his theory, Sutherland says:

⁴ This infers no belittlement of the influence exercised there by such great figures as Cooley, Znaiecki, Thomas and Park. See the preface by Strauss to Mead, 1956; pp. i-xvi.

"The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definition of the legal codes as favourable or unfavourable. In some societies an individual is surrounded by persons who invariably define the legal codes as rules to be observed, while in others he is surrounded by persons whose definitions are favourable to the violation of the legal codes." (Cressey, 1964; p. 17 - his italics.)

To return to the self as viewed by Mead, it is not something which passively and narrowly allows itself to be defined out of its social context; rather, it should be seen as a process in which two aspects or stages can be taken by themselves. One of these is "me". "Me" is made up of the organized set of attitudes adopted from others by the person himself. Its origin is in the social context of which the person forms part. "Me" is a "conventional, habitual individual" (p. 197), and may be said to represent society in the individual. It is like an "I", which is the second phase in the process, that reacts to the attitudes of others. "I" is the active and spontaneous aspect of the self; it represents the individual's conduct. We can be conscious of ourselves in a situation and aware of what this is, but we do not realize precisely how we are going to behave until our act takes place.

We cannot simultaneously act - express "I" - and reflect - take the others' attitudes - since reflection comes after action. "It is what you were a second ago that is the 'I' of the 'me'." (P.17)

A fact often overlooked is that Mead considers "I" to be of biological origin.⁵ (See Zeitlin, 1973; pp.227-

⁵In their accounts of Mead's ideas, the biological aspect of the self as represented by "I" has been neglected by, among others, the Swedes Asplund and Boglind. (Asplund, 1970; pp. 132-142. Boglind et al., 1973; pp. 40-41.) They are thereby guilty of what Wrong calls "over socializing" Mead's concept of a person. According to Wrong, sociologists must start their approach to such a concept "by the recognition that in the beginning there is the body". (Wrong, 1961; p 191).

230.) Our impulses, which are biological in nature, gain an outlet through "I". Among the impulses are those of hunger, aggression, sex and so on. They are regarded as tendencies to act or react toward a certain object, such as something threatening or a person of the opposite sex. (Pp.347-453)

By incorporating "I" in his conceptual apparatus Mead avoids the social determinism that would otherwise apply. Meanwhile, by asserting the person's power of reflection, he evades the risk of biological determinism that could come from incorporating "I", resting as this does on a biological basis. The person acts, reflects and modifies his next action in the light of experience he has gained. It can thus be said that the response of "I" is an adaptation, and one that affects not only the self but also the surrounding environment.

"The response of the 'I' involves adaptation, but an adaptation which affects not only the self but also the social environment which helps to constitute the self; that is, it implies a view of evolution in which the individual affects its own environment as well as being affected by it." (P.214)

Mead distinguishes egoistic and social aspects of the self. The former can be seen as its content, the latter as its structure. Although the self is egoistic in its content, through the biological basis which "I" represents, it is social in its structure, through "me". The egoistic aspect, "I", is controlled by the social "me". "Social control is the expression of the 'me' over against the expression of the 'I'." (P.210) It is Mead's view that the "I" can gain expression in varying degree depending on how the situation is designed and that the occasions when it is expressed are those which give most satisfaction to the individual.

"It is situations in which it is possible to get this sort of expression that seem particularly precious, namely, those situations in which the individual is

able to do something on his own, where he can take responsibility and carry out things in his own way, with an opportunity to think his own thoughts. Those social situations in which the structure of the 'me' for the time being is one in which the individual gets an opportunity for that sort of expression of the self, bring some of the most exciting and gratifying experiences." (P.213)

In these situations, according to Mead, people get a sense of self-realization. Such experience - which, Mead believes, is constantly demanded by the individual - can come through a person's asserting himself in some way against others. Such self-assertion may occur within the structure of the "me" - as, for instance, when a person fulfills an important task of high responsibility in a social situation (see the quotation above) - but if that opportunity does not exist the "I" may express itself in a violent and asocial manner.

"There are certain recognized fields within which an individual can assert himself, certain rights which he has within these limits. But let the stress become too great, these limits are not observed, and an individual asserts himself in perhaps a violent fashion. Then the 'I' is the dominant element against the 'me'." (P.210)

Thus, for Mead, a tension can be found between the person as directed by his "personal morality" on the one hand, and situational factors on the other.⁶ This means that the explanation for certain conduct can be placed in two temporally separate contexts. Inasmuch as a person is directed by his "personal morality",

⁶ On this point, Mead's view of man differs greatly from the psychodynamic standpoint which is often supported, more or less explicitly, by many scientific investigators (including sociologists). By focusing on defects in the superego or, a more recent emphasis, on disturbed ego functions (see Humble & Settergren, 1974), this school seeks the explanation for various kinds of behavior mainly in people's early experiences, and factors of their current situations are meanwhile left unheeded.

analysis is focussed on events in the past, primarily during the socialization process. But if he is directed by situational factors, he will have the present in view, the immediate nature of the situation. It is difficult to calculate where the point of balance should lie between the two concepts, but for Mead the situation as determinant of human conduct obviously had great weight.

2.2 Tendencies Developed from the Theory

In a previous study (Knutsson, 1974), I expressed some wonder as to what David Matza meant by his statement: "Those who have been granted the potentiality for freedom through the loosening of social controls but who lack position, capacity or inclination to become agents in their own behalf, I call drifters, and it is in this category that I place the juvenile delinquent." (Matza, 1964; p.29.) Although Matza does not himself make reference to Mead, I believe that there are certain likenesses between their ideas and that Matza's can be interpreted by Mead's conceptual apparatus. Compare, for example, the following quotations:

"When an individual feels himself hedged in, he recognizes the necessity of a situation in which there will be an opportunity for him to make his addition to the undertaking, and not simply to be the conventionalized 'me'." (Mead, 1934; p.212.)

"But let the stress become too great, these limits are not observed, and an individual asserts himself in perhaps a violent fashion." (Ibid.; p.210)

"The mood of fatalism...refers to the experience of seeing one's self as effect. It is elicited by being 'pushed around' and yields the feeling that one's self exercises no control over the circumstances surrounding it and the destiny awaiting it." (Matza, 1964; p.188.)

"They seek...to restore the mood of humanism in which the self is experienced as cause - the state in which man himself makes things happen. This understandable even laudable, human desire leads to a remarkable, and ironic turn of events. The restoration of the humanistic mood - and incidentally the restoration of the moral bind that is implicit in the responsible character of

the humanistic mood - may be accomplished by the commission of infraction." (Ibid.; p.189)

A "drifter" would therefore appear to be an individual who has not had an opportunity of expressing and realizing his self, of being one of what Matza terms "agents in their own behalf". When a "drifter" asserts himself against his environment by committing an infraction he regains the feeling that he is in control of himself and his destiny: this is his "restoration of the humanistic mood". Put into Mead's terminology, his "I" gets the upper hand, and he has a sense of expressing his self.

This comparison, perhaps somewhat contrived, may seem a rather abrupt way of concluding my disjointed resumé of Mead. But an intention lies behind it. Mead was preoccupied with what people have in common, what is "normal" in the individual; he did not develop his theory in order to explain deviant conduct. But I believe that three different aspects of his social psychology may be developed to explain deviancy - and that the instance given by Matza as to why an infraction is committed corresponds to the third aspect.

The first, which is merely adumbrated by Mead, has to do with socialization. People who for various reasons do not incorporate in their selves the "conventional" generalized others - representatives in this context of society's moral values - may become deviants. We have here that aspect of Mead's work which influenced the Chicago school. (See above.)

The second aspect has to do with conception of the self, with self-identity. For the most part, the individual's identity is created by the fact of others identifying him as a certain person. From this perspective we may say, greatly simplifying the matter, that if a person is treated by others as a deviant he will regard himself as one and behave in accordance with this deviant identity.

"In the same way as the child acquires his first identity by taking a role, the deviant's identity is created through the individual being allotted a deviant's part in interaction with others." (Lundén & Näsman, 1973; p.14.)

What the labeling theorists have taken up in Mead's social psychology and what has become a cornerstone of their approach, is the socially determined "me".

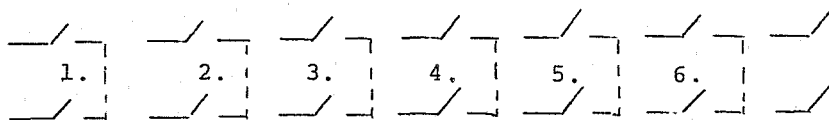
The third aspect is to be found in Mead's existentialist vein, this being developed by adopting the organic "I" into the self - the "I" which, if not given an opportunity for socially controlled expression, can manifest itself in asocial actions. Matza has here drawn on the third aspect. But the perspective is also implied in one of Goffman's works, Asylums - as Zeitlin points out (1973; pp.203-204). There, in the discussion at the end of an essay, Goffman suggests that a person might possibly be defined as a "stance-taking entity".

"Perhaps we should complicate the construct (the self) ...initially defining the individual, for sociological purposes, as a stance-taking entity, a something that takes up a position somewhere between identification with an organization and opposition to it, and is ready at the slightest pressure to regain balance by shifting its involvement in either direction. It is thus against something that the self can emerge." (Goffman, 1961; pp.319-320.)

3 THE LABELING APPROACH

3.1 Summarized Account

As was remarked earlier, studies contributing to the labeling perspective cannot be described as comprising a very coherent theory. The following diagram, which delineates the most important features, may help to summarize the approach as it stands.

A Corridor of Deviance

- | | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Primary deviation | 3. Secondary deviation | 5. Sub-culture |
| 2. Labeling | 4. Official process | 6. Deviant identity |

Diagram 1.

Deviant behavior is here seen as an interactional process taking place in a corridor. The individual can move in all directions; each section has a door in and out, also a threshold which represents a symbolic boundary dividing that section from the next stage in the process. The individual is guided through the corridor by responses from "defining agents" which function at each symbolic boundary. These hasten certain people along and shove others out of the corridor. At every step the individual answers for his own conduct on the basis of symbols by which others define him as person or actor. Thus, it is responses from those others which, essentially, create and maintain deviant careers. (The diagram is taken from Rubington & Weinberg, 1968; p.204)

A perfectly typical case may serve as illustration:

- "1) a person lives in a group where qualities and acts are viewed as deviant; 2) this person is believed

to exhibit deviance; 3) he gets typed and assigned deviant status; 4) his actions come to official notice and he becomes an official case in various agencies of social control; 5) this social processing propels him into organized deviant life, and out of conventional life; 6) finally, as a culmination of this entire process, he redefines himself, assumes the status and performs the deviant role, becoming in the end what everybody said he was at the outset." (*Ibid.*; pp.203-204.)⁷

Characteristic elements are obviously the processual thinking and the importance attached to interaction between the individual and his social surroundings.

3.2 The Procedure for Critical Examination

In the survey which follows, various central concepts and premises will be described and examined. Basically this will be carried out in two ways. Partly I shall discuss the labeling approach from the standpoint of its own postulates and see whether these are logically and consistently stated; and partly I shall discuss various consequences of the theorists' assumptions and general premisses. By taking quotations of known spokesmen, I shall let them stand for the labeling perspective. Of course, the choice of quotations and of representative writers must be somewhat arbitrary and statements from many of the writers are also rather diffuse and elusive. But the principle followed is to keep to what may be regarded as typical of the approach.

I must here point out that I take for granted that the labeling approach has a general theory of deviant behavior to go on. This is an exceedingly delicate

⁷As Akers so aptly puts it: "One sometimes gets the impression from reading this literature that people go about minding their own business and then 'wham' - bad society comes along and slaps them with a stigmatized label." (Akers, 1967; p.463.)

point, because if there is no general theory much criticism becomes invalid. Howard Becker, for example, has countered criticism leveled against him by claiming in a recent work that it is erroneous to view the approach as a theory. According to him, members of the school have proposed no solution to the etiological problems involved. (Becker, 1974; p.42)⁸ And in an article with comments on the perspective, Manning holds that the approach has been taken as a theory only by its critics. (Manning, 1975; p.17.) In my opinion, however, we may quite reasonably discuss it on the supposition that a theory is involved when we bear in mind how the tradition has been used in debate as well as its statements and claims especially in the matter of explaining deviance.

⁸ Personally, I do believe that the early labeling theorists were not clearly aware themselves whether they were putting forward a theory or not.

4 EXAMINATION OF THE APPROACH

4.1 Definition of Deviant Behavior

"Deviant behavior is behavior which is labeled deviant."
(Boglund, et al., 1973; p.99.)

"Deviance is not a property inherent in certain forms of behavior, it is a property conferred upon these forms by the audiences which directly or indirectly witness them." (Eriksson, 1966; pp.10-11.)

"...Social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'." (Becker, 1963; p.9. His italics.)

To say as Becker does, that social groups "create" deviant behavior by making rules which it is a deviation to break is in one sense of the word to state a truism. When conduct (as a physical action) is made punishable by a rule after having been without any special significance, then of course it becomes deviant by definition - although not by the labeling theorists' definition. (See below.)

According to the labeling theorists, it is the reaction of the social group which in a fundamental sense constitutes deviant conduct; without a reaction there is no deviant behavior. In consequence they believe that deviance arises in the present, in the relationship between the actor and his environment. Deviant conduct does not in itself possess any quality characterizing it as deviant. Becker wants to describe norm-violating behavior which does not arouse reactions from others as being simply "rule-breaking".⁹

⁹ However, Becker is not altogether consistent himself in following his own recommendation on the point. Each time he gives an account of norm-violating conduct and makes no reference to a reaction from someone, he ought to describe it as merely rule-breaking. But he says, for instance: "...Many homosexuals are able to keep their deviance secret from their nondeviant associates." (Ibid.; p.21 my italics.)

The labeling theorists claim that deviant conduct has no quality in itself. I consider this assertion to be incorrect if taken generally.¹⁰ The theorists have made no distinction between physical behavior and a social act, the latter being regarded as physical conduct carried out in a social context. While in certain situations a man who has killed others is awarded a medal for adjudgedly meritorious action, in other circumstances he must pay the severest penalty of the law. The reaction in either case depends on the social context. But it would be absurd to suppose that the individual responsible for some physical behavior was unaware of what it meant as a social act - that only after he had completed his deed or misdeed some reaction denoted the quality of what he had done - whether he had committed a conforming action or a deviant one.¹¹

"In contrast to these theorists, we would assert that most deviant behavior is a quality of the act, since the way in which we distinguish between behaviour and action is that behaviour is merely physical and action has meaning that is socially given." (Taylor, et. al.; 1973; p.147.)

What happens when conduct becomes subject to penal law is that its social meaning undergoes a change.

"Where is the criminal who engages in the robbing of banks and who is unaware that he is engaged in the social act of stealing?" (Ibid.; p.146.)

¹⁰ Of course it is valid for behavior shown by people who are unacquainted with the normative code of the group in which they happen to be. To give an example: as long as a child is unaware of what is "disobedient" or "ill-bred", such conduct kind has no qualitative significance for him.

¹¹ However, when there is doubt about the meaning and application of norms - when, for instance, rules are new or obsolete - the significance of conduct may be uncertain, and only the subsequent reaction may determine its import and quality.

Becker, at least, ought really to uphold the view that a distinguishing quality can be found in deviant conduct, as otherwise he is guilty either of self-contradiction or of departing from the accepted usage of terms. For, according to him, one thing a person necessarily requires in order to become a marihuana-smoker is the ability to surmount the social control imposed by definition of such smoking as immoral. "He will not begin, maintain or increase his usage of marihuana unless he can neutralize his sensitivity to the stereotype by accepting an alternative view of the practice." (Becker, 1963; p.73.) In other words, the conduct in question has a specific, socially-given meaning, which ought reasonably to imply that it possesses a quality distinguishing it from conforming behavior.¹²

Deviant conduct is defined through reference to a reaction from the environment, and Becker holds that where there is no reaction norm-violating behavior its merely "rule-breaking" and not "deviant". In a 2x2 table, with two spaces for the dichotomies "Obedient Behavior - rule-breaking Behavior" and two spaces for "Perceived as deviant - Not perceived as deviant", Becker calls the cell for "Rule-breaking Behavior" combined with "Not perceived as deviant": "Secret deviant". But since nobody has reacted to the act, it cannot by definition be called deviant. (Gibbs, 1971; p.203. Taylor et al., 1973; p.148.)

Types of Deviant Behavior

	Obedient Behavior	Rule-breaking Behavior
Perceived as deviant	Falsely accused	Pure deviant
Not perceived as deviant	Conforming	Secret deviant

¹²In contrast to cigarette-smoking, the use of "reefers" suffers, in Matza's view, from being condemned by the authorities as something evil. Matza, 1969; pp.146-147.)

Becker considers, in a later essay, that he solves the paradox involved by stating that the actor himself may perceive what he did as deviant. (1974; p.47.) But as Becker is interested in the consequences of reactions, he could just as well put a case of self-labeling in the cell combining "Perceived as deviant" and "Rule-breaking Behavior" - that is, where "Pure deviant" stands.

"...Even though no one else discovers the nonconformity or enforces the rule against it, the individual who has committed the impropriety may himself act as enforcer. He may brand himself as deviant because of what he has done and punish himself in one way or another for his behavior." (Becker, 1963; p.31.)

Becker does allow that if the actor does not himself regard his behavior as deviant the definition is in a vulnerable position; for should the act be discovered, it could lead to a reaction and thereby fulfill the criterion of deviant behavior. (1974, p.48.) But the paradox remains unsolved. If Becker requires deviant behavior to be defined through a reaction, then the cell with "Secret deviant" could more appropriately be designated "Potential deviant" instead. The reference would then be to an act which could be interpreted as deviant and which thereby might be able to fulfill the criterion.

The error in the theorists' definition lies in the tense used: "Deviant behavior is behavior which is labeled deviant." (Boglund et al.; 1973, p.99 - my italics.) Ultimately, their way of defining deviant divests the term of social and moral significance when it is applied to an actor's conduct; the assumption is that, basically, the individual in question acts unconsciously and his behavior acquires its qualities only through the subsequent reactions of other people to it.

Gibbs states another problem arising from the way labeling theorists define deviant behavior: "...Exactly what 'kind' of reaction identifies deviant acts or deviance?" (1971; p.202.) He cites an instance of what he finds puzzling in Becker's observations: "Whether an act is deviant, then, depends on how other people react to it. You can commit clan incest and suffer no more than gossip as long as no one makes a public accusation..." (Becker, 1963; pp.11-12.) Gibbs asks: "Why is it that gossip does not qualify as a reaction which identifies behavior?" (Gibbs; idem.)

4.2 The Primary Deviation

"Primary deviation, as contrasted with secondary, is polygenetic, arising out of a variety of social, cultural, psychological and physiological factors, either in adventitious or recurring combinations." (Lemert, 1972; p.62.)

"(1) A person may belong to a minority group or sub-culture whose values and ways of behaving may lead to violations of the rules of the dominant group.

(2) He may have conflicting responsibilities, and the adequate performance of one role may produce violations in a second role.

(3) He may violate rules for personal gain, usually with the expectation that he won't be caught.

(4) He may be simply unaware of the rules and violate them unintentionally.

Primary deviance is thus attributed to inconsistencies in the social structure, to hedonistic variables or to ignorance, while psychological characteristics such as personality or psychiatric disorders are neglected."

(Summary of how various labeling theorists explain the primary deviation. Gove, 1970; p.874.)

The theorists define deviant behavior as behavior which becomes deviant only when labeled so; and this - along with their manner of attacking the phenomenon itself -

explains why they are not interested in what causes the primary deviation. It is essentially taken for granted. Analysis begins from it. (Rubington & Weinberg, 1971; p.166.)

The labeling theorists shelve the question of what causes primary deviance¹³ and appear to assume that the infraction of norms is distributed fairly evenly throughout different social groups but they take the line that for various reasons the authorities notice and label only certain individuals (Lundén & Näsman, 1973; pp.33, 35). Thus the labelists implicitly proceed on the notion, praiseworthy in itself, that all are fundamentally alike - at least to start with, before the effect of labeling sets in. (See below.)

It follows that no individuals are really motivated to act deviantly, none has certain traits impelling him to do so. This outlook sharply differentiates the labeling trend from traditional research on deviance, which went on the assumption that people develop specific behavioral tendencies as result of influence exerted by "criminogenic" factors. (Mannheim, 1965; p.202.) The stigma theorists do not deny the eventual existence of such tendencies, but claim that they do not exist initially and arise only gradually in consequence of the

¹³ It is often overlooked that in Cutsiders Becker suggests a theoretical control perspective which might well be used to explain primary deviance. "Instead of asking why deviants want to do things that are disapproved of, we might better ask why conventional people do not follow through on the deviant impulses they have. Something of an answer to this question may be found in the process of commitment through which the "normal" person becomes progressively involved in conventional institutions." (1963; pp. 26-27.) Such a perspective can also be found in Lemert, whose account of deviance is more complex than would appear from this survey." ... We would like to note that new ways of thinking can be opened up by assuming that, in the absence of pressures to conform, people will deviate, or more precisely, express a variety of idiosyncratic impulses in overt behavior." (1972; p.49) I find it difficult to unite these suggestions for the explanation of deviance with the writers' labeling approach.

labeling process. But ironically enough, the theorists do consider that (hypothetical) "criminogenic" factors may assert themselves. This happens indirectly, however, through "defining agents" which in their operation apply different theories of deviance to individuals who are defined as deviant.

"The focus upon the processing of deviants by social agencies distinguishes the present approach to the study of deviance from those which attempt to explain deviant behavior by investigating the motivational 'sources' of deviant behavior, whether they are conceived to be psychological or social structural in origin. From the view of deviance followed here, the motivational processes which presumably lead to deviant behavior are conceptually independent of the social processes by which the members of the social organization impute motives and perceive irregularities in their construction of the deviant, the ground for such decisions, and the subsequent treatment of persons so defined." (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1968; p.126.)

Hirschi, who is one of the angriest opponents of the labeling approach, criticizes this conception, or rather absence of conception, of reasons for the primary deviation, and writes ironically on the subject:

"The connection between behavior and its antecedents is a more serious problem for both the scholarly and the useful versions of labelling theory. The person may not have committed a 'deviant' act, but he did (in many cases) do something. And it is just possible that what he did was a result of things that happened to him in the past; it is also possible that the past in some inscrutable way remains with him..." (1973; p.169.)

4.3 Labeling

"By labeling we usually mean that the identity ascribed to an individual is in some respect deliberately altered to his discredit because of an alleged deviation."

"Stigmatization describes a process attaching visible signs of moral inferiority to persons, such as invidious labels, marks, brands, or publicly disseminated information." (Lemert, 1972; p.65).

The starting-point of labeling comes when an individual is alleged to deviate in some respect (primary deviation). In a critical survey of the approach, Mankoff has distinguished between ascribed deviance and achieved deviance. The ascribed kind applies to cases where those who do not comply have a special physical or visible "inadequacy". Essentially, such deviance is manifested independently of the person's own behavior and intention. But achieved deviance must, on the contrary, come through the person's own activity; he must commit an act. (Mankoff, 1971; p.205.)

It appears to be well substantiated that many physically handicapped people, or those physically divergent (by being ugly, dwarfs, etc.), are subjected to treatment specifically related to their oddness and that this treatment leads to secondary problems. (See, for example, Goffman, 1972.) In consequence, the ascribed type of deviance would fulfill the conditions laid down by the stigma perspective for deviance and labeling.

"Ascribed deviance is based upon rule-breaking phenomena that fulfill all the requirements of the labeling paradigm: highly 'visible' rule-breaking that is totally dependent upon the societal reaction of community members while being totally independent of the actions and intentions of rule-breakers." (Mankoff, 1971;p. 207.)

However, in our context here it is achieved deviance which is of interest: conduct that the individual manifests or is alleged to manifest and which becomes the object of labeling.

Labeling is declared to come from the individual's significant others (corresponding approximately to the person's primary group), from the non-significant others (approximately equal to secondary groups), from the authorities, and finally from the individual himself. (Bog-lind et al.; 1973, pp.131-135.)

Self-labeling constitutes a special case and an interesting one. Independently of others, the individual can apprehend his own conduct as deviant and thus assume a negative self-image. In such cases the definition of labeling given by Boglind and his fellow-writers becomes questionable: "...The identity attributed to an individual is in some respect deliberately altered to the worse because of an alleged deviation." If the theorists cling to that definition and see self-labeling as exclusively the cause of deviant conduct, they are in effect saying: "The individual claims that he has committed a deviant action, and because of this action he ascribes a negative identity to himself, and his self-image is in some way altered to his disadvantage as result." The picture evoked is almost that of a schizophrenic whose conduct is at times severed from his active interpretation of himself and his actions.

The theorists have difficulty with another of their basic assumptions: "The individual strives for a self-image that gives him a favorable self-valuation."

(Ibid.; p.54.) For how could it be that an individual would behave in such a way as to risk being labeled (by himself) if he constantly strives for a creditable self-assessment? Why would he then "claim" that he has acted deviant? Above all, how could he ascribe a discreditable identity to himself when, as is asserted, he continually seeks to look well in his own eyes?¹⁴

The theorists say that self-labeling may have its origins in private estimations and definitions springing from various obsessions and moral principles. (Ibid.; p.115.) But in their view of the human being and the socialization process, do any "private" valuations

¹⁴ But it seems possible that the theorists have perceived the contradiction in their reasoning, for they insert the reservation that a person who changes his identity to "deviant" does not need to have a negative image of himself. (Ibid.; p.135.)

exist at all? They ask: "With whom does the individual think?" (Idem)

Self-labeling as an independent cause of deviance is an ad hoc hypothesis that rescues the labeling theory from many difficulties, but at the same time it involves total depletion of the theory.

4.4 Deviant Careers

"One of the most crucial steps in the process of building a stable pattern of deviant behavior is likely to be the experience of being caught and publicly labeled as a deviant." (Becker, 1963; p.31.)

"It proposes that changes in psychic structure accompany transitions to degraded status, during which the meaning of deviance changes qualitatively, as well as its outward expressions. Deviance is established in social roles and is perpetuated by the very forces directed to its elimination or control." (Lemert, 1973; p.ix.)

We know from self-report studies that not all those who have committed deviant (criminal) acts become identified as deviants.¹⁵ According to spokesmen of the labeling approach, individuals who have committed norm-violating actions might as well be included in the conforming category; that is, if they have escaped detection; otherwise, they are designated as deviants because they have been found out and identified as such. What identified deviants thus have in common is precisely their experience of being labeled - an experience to which the theorists attach decisive importance.

¹⁵ Swedish self-report studies do show that the more criminal acts an individual admits having committed, the greater the likelihood that he will be known to the authorities. (See Elmhorn, 1965; Olofsson, 1971 & 1973.) But it should be remarked that "individual" here means a boy in his early teens.

It is, however, extremely difficult to ascertain the effect of a societal reaction. Doing so would necessarily imply being able to check causes of the primary deviation, how sensitive the transgressor is to a societal reaction and then weighing these factors against each other. (Mankoff, 1971; p.213).

Labeling is said to exert two fundamental effects. On the one hand, a person's social situation and his possibilities of pursuing a conventional pattern of life are affected. On the other hand, it influences his self-image - and this is deemed to be the most important consequence. Together, the two factors are crucial in determining deviant careers. The term "deviant career" designates an ever-growing involvement in deviant behavior. It is assumed that at the end of the career the individual will have established a deviant identity.

In view of the importance attached to labeling, is it to be regarded as a necessary condition for the genesis of deviant careers? (Mankoff, 1971)

Becker has applied the sequential model he advocates¹⁶ to the origin of habitual marijuana-smoking. (Becker, 1963; pp.41-78.) As was pointed out earlier, a condition for such habitual use is the person's ability to

¹⁶Becker holds that, because of the methods used in traditional research on deviance, all "criminogenic" factors have been assumed to operate simultaneously. As an alternative approach, Becker has introduced the sequential model. In this, it is necessary to examine a sequence of steps, each requiring explanation, if we are to account for the establishment of a deviant behavior pattern. Every step must be gone through to arrive at a fixed pattern of deviance. (Ibid.; pp.22-23) However, Hirschi & Selvin believe that Becker's criticism of the traditional method is not wholly correct; multivariate analysis can in fact distinguish between variables that operate at different times in an evolving sequence. (Hirschi & Selvin, 1967; pp.67-68.)

overcome the influence of conventional stereotypes about the drug. If this is impossible he cannot become a marihuana-smoker. "Otherwise he will, as would most members of society, condemn himself as a deviant outsider." (Ibid.; p.73) Another of the requirements in the sequential model is that a person must believe he can conceal his use of marihuana from those about him. He fears the consequences that general knowledge about it could bring. The implication is that, in order to become a habitual marihuana-smoker, he must feel able to avoid being labeled. "If he is unable to explain or ignore these conceptions (i.e. conventional moral ones) use will not occur at all..." (Ibid.; p.77) In other words, the fear of being labeled has a deterrent effect; and should labeling take place, the person must shun the conventional image thus transmitted if a behavior pattern is to be established.

At no step in the sequence which, according to Becker, the actor necessarily traverses, does he refer to labeling taking place. Indeed, Becker holds that a person must avoid being labeled if he is to become a habitual marihuana-smoker.

Another scholar who has made empirical studies of deviant careers is Edwin Lemert. He has examined the behavior of naive and systematic check-forgers. (1972; pp.137-182 .) This sort of offender comes, typically, from a fairly good socio-economic background, exists in an isolated societal situation, and has a desire to live "well and hectically". The check-forgery has usually not previously been in any contact with the legal system and therefore no explanation of his offence - in labeling theory terms - exists. "Prior socialization as delinquents or criminals is insufficient to explain the crimes of a large percent, or even the majority, of persons who pass bad checks." (Ibid., p.164) It is characteristic of the systematic check-forgery that he works alone, lives under another name

when he is carrying out his crimes, and is geographically mobile. His feigned identity must not be exposed too soon, and he must be (or should be) gone when exposure comes. "Consequently there is seldom any direct or immediate validation of the stigma." (*Ibid.*; p.180). Lemert believes that the activity of such forgers leads to identity crises which arouse tension and anguish.

To find release, the forger may then deliberately act in such a way that he will be arrested and condemned, or he may passively accept being caught. In either case, he gets his criminal identity confirmed when he is apprehended. This identity is developed in connection with the nature of his crime rather than with the societal reactions which he risks. Lemert nowhere indicates that labeling occurred before development of the criminal identity. (See Mankoff, 1971; p.208.)

If the labeling theorists consider that they have started a general theory of deviance - which is the impression they give - then it might be thought unfortunate that a pair of their leading advocates should have made empirical studies which go against the claim that labeling is of central importance in the origin of deviant careers. The fact is that in the two cases chosen for study, labeling does not appear to be a necessary condition for the careers.

4.5 The Deviant Identity

"Unequivocal perception of a deviant self comes when the person enters new settings, when supportive (normalizing) interaction with intimates becomes antagonistic, or when contact is made with stigmatizing agencies of social control" (Lemert, 1972; p.81.)

"The individual who is subjected to this labeling risks having his self-image altered in a negative way so that it will agree with others' definition of him. The 'reified deviant' has then accepted the generalizations made about him personally, for example, in mass media personal investigations, and elsewhere." (Boglund *et al.*, 1973; p.123.)

"The deviant identity becomes the controlling one."
(Becker, 1963; p.34).

Because an individual is treated as if he possessed certain characteristics which are attached to the stigma placed on him, his identity alters and becomes deviant. His transformed identity will be attested by behavior consistent with a deviant identity. Thus, the labeling process is said to produce "a self-fulfilling prophecy".¹⁷

It is Hirschi's view that theories of deviance can be described roughly as "kinds-of-people" theories or as situation ones. (See Cohen, 1966; pp.42-44). However, no theory can be regarded as being purely of one or the other variety. Rather is it so that emphasis is laid on one or other of the two elements. Labeling was initially a theory of situation, but in spirit it is a theory of human types, for of course individuals with deviant identities are alleged to commit their deviant acts because they have "deviant" personalities. "Ironically," says Hirschi, "the kinds-of-people theory reaches its ultimate expressions among those most concerned to avoid it, the role theorists and/or the labelers." (1973; pp.165-166)

¹⁷ One sometimes gets the impression that a pure play on words is being offered here. Consider, for instance, the following remark from a thirty-four-year-old drug-addict, quoted in support of the labeling thesis by Lundén & Näsman (1973; pp.20-21): "The (newspaper) campaign cemented us together - we became drug-addicts. From having been just anyone who turned on we became addicts. We started to act out our addiction, started to play along in the role handed out to us." I suggest as a possible interpretation of this statement: The individual is not what he does, but if other people say that he is what he does, he will become what he does. In addition the quotation could suggest that the drug addict in question had picked up some basic elements of the labeling theory, and thus shows the unreliability of the interview method.

But it remains unclear what is actually intended by the term "deviant identity". This identity is supposed, basically, to have two different sources, and thus, even as viewed by the labeling theorists, it should correspond to two types of identity. Yet what constitutes "true" deviant identity for them does not emerge.

Their statements on the matter are sometimes so worded as to give the impression that, through the "defining agents", deviant identity is unambiguously of social determination: that the deviant has entirely internalized the stereotypes transmitted by labeling. (See above.)

At other times, it would seem that the deviant identity arises as a sort of defense on the individual's part against what is ascribed to him. The identity can be a defense against the stereotype.

"...The individual in a group which is organized on the basis of common deviations can be provided with a 'deviant identity'. This is a new self-image which is built up on the basis of an ideology supplied to the group, or which derives from his rationales of his behavior becoming sustainable through the support of others." (Boglund et al, 1973; p.116.)

In Lemert's study of check-forgers, described earlier, the forger's identity and his identity problem are discussed in detail. Because the working technique of such a criminal demands a pseudo-identity, geographic mobility and unobtrusiveness, he gets no opportunity to define himself in relation to others. His self becomes fluid and lacks structure and this leads to an identity crisis. According to Lemert, the forger solves this, as already mentioned, either by passively letting himself be arrested or by seeing to it that he gets caught. He thus has his identity established. "In effect, he receives or chooses a negative identity." (Lemert, 1972; p.181 - *italics mine.*)

That quotation reflects the obscurity which is noticeable in these writers and which results from their uncertainty as to what deviant identity really is. They are unclear about this because they have not worked out for themselves whether the identity is directly and wholly determined by the societal environment or whether it is partly or wholly self-determined.

The novice marihuana-smoker in Becker's paper "Becoming a Marihuana User" (1963; pp.41-78) starts with a willingness to smoke marihuana. Apart from his learning the technique, perceiving the effects and perceiving them positively,¹⁸ he must overcome the social control entailed by restrictions on the drug, the restraint imposed by fear that he will be exposed to the conventional environment as a user and finally the obstacle implied by the definition of marihuana-use as immoral. This process may be described as a sequence where the individual enters into new situations which he must master. In other words, it is the individual who "decides" if he can and will become a deviant.

When one returns to Mead, one is struck by how much these other writers have diluted his interactionism. Now and then they assure their readers that the victims of labeling do not necessarily suffer too greatly - but their works leave an impression of narrow social determinism all the same. Mead's "I" has disappeared even if traces of it can still be discerned. We can only speculate on why this has happened. One reason may be that the concept on "me" is more easily acceptable to a behavior-oriented

¹⁸ Becker himself gives his model the status of a theory. But one may ask what predictions could be made from it. (Hirschi, 1969; pp.14n., 40.) What would the independent variables be which affect a person's ability to learn the technique, to perceive the effects and to enjoy them? Is the model not in actual fact a truism?

researcher. "Me" is a social product which basically can be predicted for the individual by mapping out his societal environment while "I" is difficult to define and grasp firmly. Possibly the cause lies in the writers' standpoint for they are on the deviant's side. And if emphasis is placed entirely on "me", the deviant is freed from responsibility through social determinism; he becomes merely the victim of the societal environment's definitions.

4.6 Secondary Deviation

"Secondary deviation is deviant behavior, or roles based upon it, which becomes a means of defense, attack or adaption to the overt or covert problems created by the societal reaction to primary deviation. In effect, the original 'causes' of the deviation recede and give way to the central importance of the disapproving, degradational and isolating reactions of society." (Lemert, 1972; p.48.)

As Mankoff points out, there is an assumption here that no matter what the causes of primary deviance may be, their significance will be minimized once labeling has taken place. Henceforth, new deviations will be regarded as entirely the effects of societal reactions. Thus the possibility is ignored that the causes of the primary deviation may continue to exert effect.

"Without such a premise, one might attribute career deviance and its consequences not to societal reaction but to the continual effects of social structural strains, psychological stress, or disease states which produced initial rule-breaking." (Mankoff, 1971; p.212.)

Another assumption is that societal reactions necessarily act in a way that increases deviation. (Taylor et al., 1973; p.160.) However, as was shown earlier, Becker for one is contradictory on this point. According to him, the experienced risk of being labeled or the direct acceptance of labeling has a deterrent effect on deviant behavior.

If we put the matter the other way around, these theorists can be interpreted as meaning that without societal reactions the deviation would remain at its "primary level" and thus be understood to present no problems or it might even disappear by itself. However, such an interpretation contains a logical trap constructed by the theorists. The deviation becomes primary insomuch it is labeled. In its turn the labeling gives rise to secondary deviation. We can not, then, speak about a fixed level of primary deviance. By rights, the interpretation should run like this: Without societal reactions there would only be rule-breaking behavior, which it is implied presents no problems (?) - or, to put it still more pointedly, there would only be behavior.

The labeling approach has acquired a radical image by placing itself on the deviants' side as opposed to that of the Establishment. Matza describes the basic outlook of the tradition as "appreciative", in contrast to the "positivist" school with its "correctional" perspective.

"These appreciative sentiments are easily summarized. We do not for a moment wish that we could rid ourselves of deviant phenomena. We are intrigued by them. They are an intrinsic, ineradicable and vital part of human society." (Matza, 1969; p.17.)

This "radical" premise has been attacked from two quarters: on the one hand, by a group which considers that in actual fact it is not radical, and on the other, by researchers with a traditional "correctional" attitude.

Alvin Gouldner, to take a representative of the "radical" side, considers that the labeling approach is critical on the wrong level. While minor officials in the control apparatus are attacked, the institutions and division of power which really deserve critical study are spared. In Gouldner's opinion, the perspective has a liberal posture and in actual fact serves the interests of those in power.

"The new underdog sociology proposed by Becker is, then, a standpoint that possesses a remarkably convenient combination of properties: it enables the sociologist to befriend the very small underdogs in a local setting, to reject the standpoint of the middle dog respectables and notables who manage local caretaking establishments, while, at the same time, to make and remain friends with the really top dogs in Washington agencies or New York foundations." (Gouldner, 1968; p.110.)¹⁹

¹⁹ However, in my view, Gouldner is somewhat casual in his criticism. Becker has given attention (1963; pp. 121-162) to various top-level power and interest groups although admittedly in a rather vague and tentative way. When it comes to evaluating the radical element in the approach perhaps the McCarthyism which raged in the United States during the Fifties might usefully be brought to mind.

The other type of criticism may be represented by Hirschi. He calls the entire labeling perspective an "anti-theory"; the connection between behavior and social definitions has there been destroyed, as has that between behavior and its underlying causes. The appreciative attitude itself is equated by Hirschi with the "happy nigger" outlook on the racial problem. He has a strongly empirical orientation and opposes above all the acceptance or rejection of various assumptions with an eye to their ideological contents instead of how they agree with facts.

"Sociology will suffer, however, as long as we insist on examining assumptions with an eye to their ideological or sociological purity, and as long as we believe that our assumptions guarantee truth, while their assumptions guarantee error, whatever the facts may be." (Hirschi, 1973; p.171.)

Thus, in Hirschi's view (1969; p.232 & 1973; p.166) the veracity of a theory, including the labeling theory, is determined by how well it corresponds to empirical facts.

In the course of my teaching work, I have often been struck by the great sympathy which the labeling perspective wins among students. This, I believe, may be partly explained by the fact that it offers a convenient and simple solution to a moral/ethical dilemma.

In traditional criminology the deviant is relieved of moral responsibility for his actions because, from its deterministic viewpoint, he is governed in life by "forces" which he does not know and cannot influence. To the extent that he is affected by those forces, he will differ from conventional, "normal" individuals and be "odd". And his "oddness" will constitute the basis on which society, through its institutions, takes steps against him as a deviant. That "oddness" must be remedied by various rehabilitating measures, primarily in the form of treatment. But research in the field shows that treatment, in whatever form it is given, does not as a rule produce the desired result. Critics of the treatment ideology have demonstrated that, contrary to what is generally supposed, it in many ways exerts an adverse effect on those for whose benefit it is alleged to be carried out. So punishment became treatment, or rather was thus renamed, and since the starting point for appropriate measures was what it was thought was the deviant's need, legal rights and guarantees were endangered. Thus, even if the individual could not be blamed for his misdeeds, repressive steps could be taken against him.

As viewed by the labeling perspective in its most popular form, the deviant starts by doing what everybody else does but has the bad luck to get caught and labeled. He thereby becomes "reified", and henceforth he behaves in accord with expectations placed on him. There is nothing special about his actions; others have simply labeled them deviant from more or less

dubious motives. In exactly the same way as his "positivist" equivalents, he is determined by circumstance and thus without responsibility. The difference between him and them is that in his case the "criminogenic forces" are located in the conventional societal environment - which bears responsibility instead of him. To the extent that the deviant is "odd", it is as result of how he is treated by those in his environment and by the institutions which are ostensibly bent on his rehabilitation. Hirschi expresses this by saying of the labeling theory: "...It must be made to contain the obvious implication that the square is the culprit." (1973; p.167) Two practical implications of the perspective are that behavior should be redefined and no longer described as deviant, and that no interfering measure should be taken - for both things simply make matters worse. (Schur, 1973; pp.117-171. Rubington & Weinberg, 1971; pp.169-170.)

The approach implies also a criticism of those treatment and control agencies which in the view of traditional criminology must handle the rehabilitation of deviants on behalf of the community. As the deviant is himself without responsibility, it is ultimately we others who are answerable for his misdeeds, and corrective measures against him should not be resorted to. This means that there is no longer any need either to take a stand on his responsibility or to make an unpleasant decision on repressive measures. Christie considers that a "moral blindness" lies inherent in the perspective. According to him (1973; p.6), in spite of everything, certain behavior which is evil exists in every society and ought to be controlled. Perhaps, however, it would be more accurate to say that the perspective suffers from being "morally one-eyed".

Even in debate of a popular kind, outside academic circles, the perspective has aroused a certain interest. People see, for instance, that punished offenders meet with suspicion at working-places and elsewhere; and that they do not get "a fair chance". This line of thought is to be found in the labeling perspective: labeling allegedly makes it difficult for the person labeled to lead a conventional life because a particular role has been assigned to him. (See Schwarz & Skolnick, 1973.) On the other hand, the labeling theorists believe that the most important consequence of labeling is an altered self-image. In addition, the popular perception about the difficulties of punished offenders springs from a quite different conception: that of atonement. Criminals incur a moral debt toward society when they commit their crimes but this is discharged through their punishment. Thus, at least in principle, when they have served their sentences they should be regarded as exculpated and enjoy the same opportunities as everybody else.

It is probably evident from this study that the labeling approach, taken as a theory, contains a number of paradoxes and assumptions leading to consequences which may be judged unclear and dubious. Some comments are perhaps called for here. Since the perspective is so inconsistent, both my description and discussion of it are dependent on which statements were chosen from the theorists. It would, therefore, be possible to argue for another, perhaps more "favorable", interpretation. But my principle has been that the approach should be interpreted and discussed in the same way as when taken up in debate. That the perspective contains contradictions and in many ways lacks clarity is incontestable. And so even if a survey were carried out in another spirit it would still come to the conclusion that the approach, considered as a theory, is impaired by a good many weaknesses.

But if the perspective cannot be considered a theory, what is it then? The perspective's prescribed method, participant observation, yields detailed information better suited to description and understanding than to explanation²⁰—the understanding here being for the deviant's situation and the motivations behind his actions. Taylor and his fellow-writers (1973; p. 160) hold that what the labeling theorists have really achieved is a description in analytical language of those aspects of social reality which comprise deviant behavior, aspects in some ways neglected. Regarded as more of a descriptive tradition, the perspective has in my opinion provided interesting insights into the deviants's behavior seen from his own viewpoint.

²⁰ Possibly, uncertainty has arisen as to whether the perspective is a theory because the labeling theorists have clothed their observations in an all too theoretical garb.

A theoretical tradition does not only mean however that a certain explanation is offered of some phenomenon: it can fulfill other functions as well. The approach came at a time when above all subculture theories were fashionable as explanations, but also when "positivists", oriented toward personal characteristics, exerted strong influence. The approach brought about a relativity in what was studied and traditionally taken for granted. The "deviant" element in behavior was no longer a self-evident matter since various assumptions about the conduct and characteristics of deviants were called into question. New fields of study, hitherto ignored in many respects, became the object of study.

For instance, we find in Becker an orientation toward juridical and organizational sociology. Deviant behavior is seen as a result of the fact that various interest groups for more or less honorable reasons got their rules established in law. These rules are then implemented by officials of organizations set up for the purpose. Implementation of the rules is primarily determined by goals which are created by the organizations themselves. This view opened the way for a sociology of law founded on the sort of criminology which proceeds from a conflict perspective and attracts increasing attention in academic circles especially among younger criminologists. (See Chambliss, 1969 & 1973, and Taylor et al., 1973 & 1975.)

Besides helping to arouse interest in sociology of law, the labeling tradition has contributed to another orientation. Becker, Goffman and Lemert are called "neo-Chicagoans" by Matza. Because of their subjective outlook, they stand more or less emphatically on the deviant's side; they have in Matza's view (1969; pp. 37-40) brought about a renaissance of naturalistic criminology - a criminology which is "true" toward the object, or rather the subject, under study. Matza himself is sometimes termed an interactionist.

But if he is one, he must be classified as a special case. Inklings of interactionism can be found in Delinquency and Drift (1964) and features of it are clearly expressed in Becoming Deviant (1969). In the earlier work where Matza disputes against "positivist" criminology (to which he assimilates the subculture theories) he pleads for a return to some of the basic ideas of the classical school. One thing he would like is to substitute "soft determinism" for the strictly determinist viewpoint which he thinks is to be found in traditional criminology.

"The fundamental assertion of soft determinism is that human actions are not deprived of freedom because they are causally determined... Since man occupies a position in a complex and loosely organized social system, since he is the object of unclear and often conflicting forces he possesses some leeway of choice. He acts, and his actions are variable free." (Matza, 1969; pp. 9,11 .)

In Becoming Deviant Matza unites his neoclassicism with parts of the labeling perspective by concerning himself with the aspect of the tradition where the deviant can be interpreted as a person who acts consciously.²¹ He has thereby introduced will as a factor in his discussion of deviant behavior. In so doing he has made room for theoretical reasoning on general prevention and on issues pertaining to this. General prevention has been a matter of more or less self-evident importance in penal law and criminal policy, but it has not been so among social scientists investigating behavior. In the paradigm they use, it has not been discussed and presumably cannot be.²² There, the

²¹ More specifically, Matza has thoroughly analyzed the will-determinism concept taking Becker's essay "Becoming a Marihuana User" as point of departure. (Matza, 1969; pp. 109-142.)

²² It may for instance be mentioned that of two works used as textbooks in criminology, one (Cohen, 1966) devotes only a third of its 114 pages, to general prevention; and the other (Mannheim, 1964) only about three pages in a book 708 pages long.

"positivist" view of the person has prevailed. An entirely different conception exists elsewhere, for example in the economic field. Economists work with the idea of "rational man" - which is why economists who give their attention to criminological problems can so easily discuss general prevention and try to evaluate it. (Cf. G. Becker, 1968.) The conclusion would thus be that, by changing the paradigm which behavior specialists use, the labeling perspective has, indirectly and one supposes quite unintentionally, made it possible for them to reason about general prevention and the issues connected with this.

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Part II

AN EMPIRICAL ELUCIDATION

The theoretical labeling approach has attracted great interest since its appearance in the Sixties. In simplified form, it exerts much influence on public discussion, there providing a general explanation for deviant and criminal behavior. Shoals of students at schools of social science, and in university departments where behavior is studied, have not only become acquainted with the theory but largely accept it as an explanation for deviant conduct in general. This has happened despite uncertainty as to whether the labeling theorists have actually intended that their approach should be considered a fully-developed theory. They have, it is true, expressed themselves in a way that justifies our supposing them to have such an intention. But for the most part, it is an open question how much empirical support exists for the perspective regarded as a theory. The aim of this study is to investigate just what empirical foundation it possesses.

In a previous work of mine (1975 I showed that a number of inconsistencies are mingled in the theory. But it must be added that the theory is very complex and difficult to grasp, primarily because of vague, unclearly defined concepts which can be construed in a number of ways. This in turn means that empirical testing is difficult, if not impossible.¹ One procedure in the circumstance is to take a certain interpretation and see what support can be found for it. We have good reason to suppose that the interpretation chosen here is the one of which people are generally aware.² It is also, in my view, the one which most urgently requires elucidation. Although the theory covers deviant behavior in general and different abnormal mental states in particular, what follows will deal mainly with "traditional" criminal behavior.

The theory assumes that everybody is now and then guilty of behavior which can be regarded as deviant or criminal. In the majority of cases this conduct goes undetected. But for various reasons, certain people are found out and are labeled. One reason may be that somebody can gain personal advantage from application of a rule. Factors especially pointed out here have to do with the bureaucratic way in which control organizations are supposed to function. It is thought that, for the most part, such organizations apply the rules to make them yield the maximum profit in the form of registered lawbreakers, while the least possible effort is made. This means that groups which exercise

¹See Popper, 1972; pp. 317-321. According to Popper, a theory which contains a contradiction may logically be supposed to permit all assertions; this implies that, essentially, everything confirms it and nothing refutes it.

²The interpretation that follows does not differ appreciably from the variation presented by Lundén & Näsman in Stämpningsprocessen (The Labeling Process), 1973.

little social power are taken to run the greatest risk of labeling. Labeling implies that the identity attributed to the person labeled is in some respect negatively altered. The process is alleged to have two effects: the person's social situation may be changed, and so may his self-image. His self-image is so affected by labeling that it becomes precisely the same as the identity imputed to him. As for his social situation, the interactional structure can be altered because, as he is rejected by "normal" people, he is forced into the company of other outsiders; and the structure of legitimate opportunity can be reduced by his impaired educational opportunities and his diminished chances of getting work. It is supposed that, together, the changes in self-image and of social situation give rise to deviant careers with ever-greater involvement in deviant behavior. The actions carried out as result of labeling are termed secondary deviations. Gradually, the individual's life comes to center around his deviant behavior; he lives in a subculture with norms and values which are alien to the conventional community. At the final point of his deviant career he is assumed to have evolved a deviant identity: this is a reflection of the identity conveyed to him through labeling.³ See the diagram below.⁴

³ Hereafter, when the labeling theory is mentioned in the text this interpretation is intended.

⁴ The labeling theorists define deviant behavior with reference to a reaction it produces. Rule-breaking behavior without a reaction is described as non-conforming. Strictly speaking, behavior which has not been labeled cannot be called a deviation. Thus, the diagram below is not wholly correct. See Part 1, section 4.1.

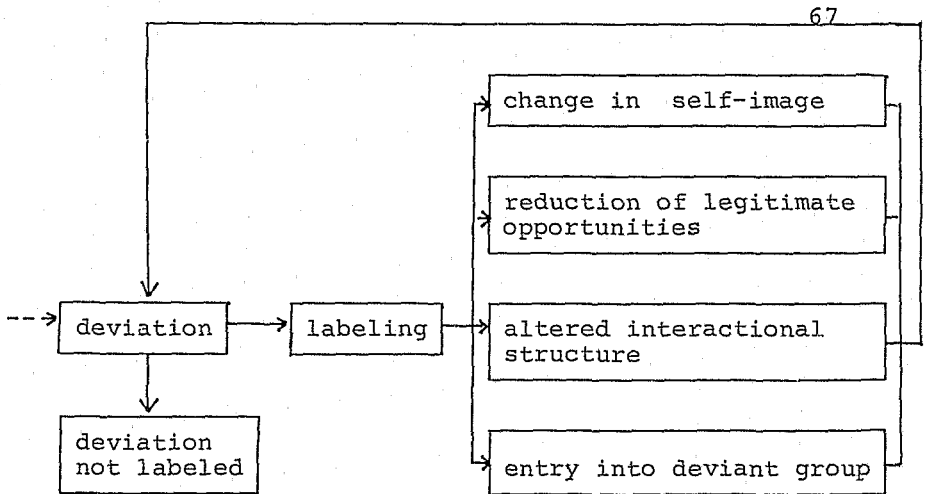


Diagram 1. The Labeling Process. (From Lundén & Näsman, 1973, p. 16.)

The entire theory is marked by processual thinking: in a typical case the deviant's behavior evolves during a period when certain phases succeed one another. Most characteristic is the view of labeling as a form of determinant for deviant behavior. The changed self-image that results from labeling is in fact a central aspect of the theory. The perspective came into existence partially as a reaction against theories oriented toward personal traits. It called into question many of the assumptions typical of those theories and meanwhile sharply opposed the methods associated with them. The labeling theorists are distinguished by an anti-positivist attitude; they prefer to use soft data gathered through participant observation, depth interviews and by similar methods. But confirming a theory by means of participant observation - the method particularly recommended - entails a very questionable procedure. Ultimately, the sense of credibility gained by readers from the description will constitute the criterion by which the theory is, or is not, accepted; this means that the criterion will be very vague.

(Huber 1972 & 1973.) Many of the hypotheses which can be drawn from the theory are, however, amenable to testing with hard data.

Various studies will be used in what follows here to help illustrate different parts of the theory. The studies in question are taken primarily from reports in large American sociological and criminological journals.⁵ The reason is that the labeling theory and most contributions to the subject have been published in America. It has not been possible to find any extensive and very thoroughgoing test of the theory, and probably none exists.

Essentially, there are three hypotheses which may be regarded as central to the theory. The first is that a systematic selection occurs so that persons with low social status are, to a greater extent than those with high social status, exposed to legal interventions for similar acts. Putting the matter more incisively: legal intervention is better explained by social status than by illegal behavior. The second hypothesis is that labeling gives rise to an altered self-image. Deviant status is assigned to a person, and this new identity is internalized. The third central hypothesis is that labeling gives rise to secondary deviance. Intervention in one form or another thus increases the likelihood of future deviations. These three hypotheses will be discussed against the background of the empirical studies mentioned and other available information.

Labeling itself is an extremely diffuse concept and can cover everything from people wrinkling their noses at an alleged deviant to his being given a prison sentence. This necessarily means that the three hypotheses, too, are very unspecific. In what follows, the term "labeling" comprises variously detection of the deviant's action,

⁵ Concerning the procedure followed in the selection of studies, see Appendix.

arrest, sentence to some sanction or else knowledge about some or all of these events. Such heedless use of the term cannot be blamed on the author; it comes from the concept not having been well enough defined.

3.1 Labeling

Now and then everybody commits criminal actions, but only certain people get labeled. Those who do come primarily from exposed social environments. This fits together with the view that control organizations pursue a systematic selection which causes those weak in social power to come in for official labeling more extensively than those who are strong in power.

The above assumption does not belong solely to the theoretical labeling approach. It also forms part of the theoretical conflict perspective. (See, for instance, Chambliss, 1969.) However, a fundamental difference exists in the way the two look at labeling and its effects. The labeling theorists maintain that labeling gives rise to a transformed self-image, which in turn causes the individual to behave in a more intensely deviant manner. Their theory is thus social-psychological in character. The conflict theorists, on the other hand, construct a macro-sociological perspective. For them, the creation and application of laws result from basic conflicts which are bound up with the economy of the society in question.

Some ten studies dealing with this aspect of labeling theory have been examined. To summarize and interpret their findings would be a difficult matter, mainly because different procedures have been followed. Some of these studies' findings lend a certain support to the theory, others go against it. To attempt to analyze the reasons for this would entail arduous and time-consuming work and for various reasons this has not been deemed essential. But differences of theoretical premise, method and choice of investigated population are, it should be pointed out, of importance in the matter. With the heterogeneity of American society in mind, we can well imagine that variations exist among various local communities - for example,

between towns which, socially and ethnically, are fairly homogeneous and cities with pronouncedly slum-areas - as regards discrimination against individuals from diverse groups.

If we put results of these studies together and make allowances for the detailed information that goes by the board, the following picture emerges - chiefly with reference to juvenile delinquency.

Concerning infractions, we find that in studies using the self-report method practically all respondents (young men) state that they have committed criminal acts. However this statement requires some modification. While it is true that nearly all admit to having broken some law, there are differences as to the admitted frequency for their acts and the type of behavior involved. These differences do not vary greatly in conjunction with such background variables as social class, race, etc. (Gould, 1969) Since the majority report that they have committed some sort of illegal action and yet few are known to the authorities, it is reasonable to suppose that it is probability factors which play a decisive part in determining whether one becomes known. Generally speaking, this view is confirmed; the more deviant actions a respondent admits to, the greater the likelihood of his having been in contact with representatives of the authorities. Frequency of the act seems to matter more than its type. (Williams & Gold, 1969) But this line of reasoning needs amplification. Most interventions occur in those situations where the acts are committed. This means that the way in which the control organization chooses to use its resources is of importance. Measures are taken primarily in areas where it is expected that the criminal actions will occur : i.e. where the population is markedly of low socio-economic status and, frequently, belongs to an ethnic minority. This would explain the fact that such groups are somewhat over-represented in various kinds of criminal registers. As for the measures taken in the situation where inter-

vention takes place, they can depend on a number of different factors. If the act is deemed serious, it usually results in arrest. If, on the other hand, the infraction is regarded as fairly trivial, which is generally the case, the behavior of those involved in the situation will be decisive. In a large proportion of cases, the police are summoned by some member of the public. This person's behavior crucially affects the action of the police. If he demands that the police should take some more comprehensive measures, they will for the most part comply. But differences seem to exist here among various ethnic groups. Most incidents of the kind are racially homogeneous with the notifier and the alleged lawbreaker black or white, and blacks seem to demand intervention more frequently than do whites.

(Black & Reiss, 1970) The appearance of the person who is the object of the intervention is also important. If he looks like a "typical" juvenile delinquent, the probability of his being taken to the police station for further questioning is increased. His behavior also matters greatly. Should he behave with either too much or too little respect toward representatives of the law, he runs more risk of being arrested. (Piliavin & Briar, 1964) After arrest, handling of the case depends chiefly on how serious the offense is judged to be. Less serious violations result in registration and a warning while those assessed as more serious often come before the court. (Terry, 1967) Some of the studies show discrimination against blacks and individuals from social groups of lower status. (Ferdinand & Luchterhand, 1970) Such persons do seem to be taken to court more frequently than whites of higher social status having regard to the type of offense committed and the known number of criminal acts, and they do seem when sentenced to get stiffer penalties. (Chiricos, Jackson & Waldo, 1970. Marshall & Purdy, 1972. Thornberry, 1973.) However, some studies have failed to show the existence of such discrimination. (Erickson, Maynard & Empey, 1963.)

Taken as a whole, the studies suggest that legal interventions are determined more by the individual's behavior than by his social status.⁶ This conclusion may seem at variance with the summary given above. But differences between various groups as regards discrimination are, where it has appeared, not especially marked. Meanwhile some of the studies suffer from methodological defects.⁷ The reasoning here goes against the hypothesis that legal intervention is explained more by social status than by criminal behavior. If, however, the hypothesis is expressed in a milder form, namely: there is a tendency for more thorough measures to be taken against people of inferior social status than against those with superior status, then it cannot be rejected. In view of the composition of population in American penal institutions, it would probably seem difficult to explain why the poor and blacks are over-represented there without adducing some form of systematic selection. But it is still not easy to explain how the discrimination takes place. We must bring in an elusive interplay between legal and non-legal factors.⁸

This account of American studies has been so summary because they are of doubtful validity when applied to Swedish circumstances. As compared with Sweden, American society is very heterogeneous, ethnically as well as socially, and at the same time the criminal justice system is of another construction. In America the conception of juvenile delinquency is much broader and more vague, discretionary powers of the police are considerably greater, and the legal apparatus in relation to young people is different. I have therefore chosen to go through some Swedish studies which may throw light on the question at issue.

⁶ The conclusion applies only to "traditional" crimes.

⁷ See Tittle, 1975. He analyzes thoroughly a number of the studies reported here and arrives at essentially the same conclusion.

⁸ For a treatment of this problem, see Hirschi, 1969; Chapters IV and V and particularly pages 66-82.

A criminological study (Olofsson, 1971) has been published in connection with a project carried out in Örebro, a large town of central Sweden. When the results of this study are collated concerning breaches of the law, their detection and measures taken by the authorities, the following picture emerges. Nearly all the boys (aged about fifteen) who took part admitted that they had committed one or more of the criminal acts included in the inquiry. While sixty percent stated that on some occasion they had been discovered, about fourteen percent had, because of their criminal behavior, become cases for investigation by the Child Welfare Committee.⁹

As for the offenses committed, we may say that boys who confessed only to petty offenses reported only a few types of these and with only low frequency. Boys who admitted to serious offenses had also committed many minor offences and on a number of occasions. It seems, then, that criminality might roughly be described as an accumulative process where the person starts with trivial offenses, commits a number of these and goes on to serious crime. For the most part, the detection of offenses mounts with their stated frequency. But some offenses have such low visibility that the risk of discovery is very slight. Apart from this factor, it can generally be said that boys who confess to many infractions have more frequently been found out than boys who admit to few. Whether the detection of a certain offense results in the police being notified depends less on how often the offense has been committed than how grave it is considered to be. Serious offenses are more frequently reported than minor ones. Since boys who confess to serious offenses state that they are guilty of other infractions as well, the implication must be that boys reported to the police have a greater offense background than those who have been discovered but not reported.

⁹ The information given here on the proportion of boys found out and those before the Child Welfare Committee must be regarded as approximate because of external and internal missing cases in the investigation.

Boys who have neither been found or not reported should have the least offense background. And this is confirmed by the data.¹⁰ See Table 1.

Table 1. Offense background, discovery, investigation by Child Welfare Committee

Survey material	n = 453	Offense background 6.76 (average)
State that they have committed an offense on some occasion	98%	4.48
State that they have been found out on some occasion	60%	7.98
Have been the subject of investigation by the Welfare Committee	14%	10.94

This table is adapted from appendices XI:1, XIII:2 and table XII:1 in Olofsson, 1971; pp. 135, 301, 307. Offense background refers to number of offense categories ticked.

These results agree with those of a Stockholm self-reporting inquiry in respects where the two are comparable. The boys there who said that they were known to the police reported considerably more crime, and of a graver kind, than boys who were not so known. (Elmhorn, 1969; p. 59.)

¹⁰ That cases investigated by the Child Welfare Committee have a higher crime load applies irrespective of when the report was made. Thus, the greater offense background of these cases cannot be looked on as the effect of labeling. See Olofsson, 1971; pp. 264-267.

Thus, while it is correct that practically all youths are guilty of criminal actions, variations exist both as to the frequency and the type of infraction. Those aspects affect discovery of offenses and also whether they are reported to the police.

As for the socio-exonomic groups to which the youths belong - a crucial factor according to the labeling theory - we find a slight over-representation of the lowest category, social group III, among those who have been detected and investigated by the Youth Welfare Committee. However, social group III has at the same time a high volume of offenses. See Table 2.

Table 2. Socio-economic offense background, detection, investigation by Child Welfare Committee

Socio-economic groupings	Nos. I & II n=206		No. III n=247
Offense background	5.14	5.99	7.31
<hr/>			
State that they have committed an offense on some occasion	97 %		98 %
State that they have been found out on some occasion	58 %		62 %
Have been the subject of investigation by the Child Welfare Committee	13 %		17 %

For source, see Table 1.

The offense background for social group III, although high, is much dispersed. This social grouping consists of two different education groups, numbered 6 and 7. Members of educational group No. 6 are occupationally skilled, but those in No 7 have no vocational training.

While boys from homes in the latter category are plainly over-represented as regards detection of their misdeeds and being reported to the police, there is no difference between boys in No. 6 and in the upper social categories. Consequently, a small part of social group III is responsible for the difference between that group and the two higher social categories. The offense background is also higher than in Nos. I and II. See the following table.

Table 3. Educational group, offense background, detection, investigation by Child Welfare Committee.

Educational groups	6 n=158	7 n=89
Offense background	6.05	7.75
<hr/>		
State that they have committed an offense on some occasion	97 %	99 %
State that they have been found out on some occasion	58 %	70 %
Have been the subject of investigation by the Child Welfare Committee	11 %	26 %

For source, see Table 1.

The risk of investigation by the Child Welfare Committee is nearly twice as great for boys from educational group No.7.as for those in all three social categories. The higher figure for this group agrees with that found by Carlsson in his Stockholm study, Unga lagöverträdare (Juvenile Delinquents, Part II; 1972). There, boys from homes which are socially exposed in various respects run from two to three times more risk of becoming known to the police. In the Örebro material, however, the overall

risk level is considerably higher, with about fifteen percent of the boys known to the Child Welfare Committee as against five percent in Stockholm. But straightforward comparison between these two levels is not possible because, inter alia, the two investigated populations have different age structures. Although the difference between the levels may seem great, in the Stockholm material twenty percent up to the age of about twenty-one are registered for offenses. Considering that much more extensive criminality exists in Stockholm than in Örebro, also that detection is less likely there, and in view of what has previously emerged here, we can count on a higher crime volume, looked at generally, for the group of boys eleven to fifteen years old who are known to the police. But there is no way of confirming this from available sources.

Inasmuch as boys from the lowest socio-economic group are more frequently found out (unofficially labeled) and reported (officially labeled), the labeling theorists are right. But both unofficial and official labeling can be traced back to the individual's behaviour so far as intensity of the degree and type of the acts are concerned. If we look at the proportion of those detected who are reported, we find that it is substantially greater for social group III, educational group No. 7 than for other categories, approximately forty percent and twenty percent respectively. We may thus suppose that a greater tendency exists to report boys precisely from that group, and that this tendency does not derive from boys' offenses but from their social status. Unfortunately it is impossible to tell from the available information whether these boys who were reported had committed more infractions and of a more serious kind, even if the data suggests that they had. The following hypothetical reasoning may in any case be advanced. Does any observable characteristic distinguish this group from the others which could produce the tendency to report these boys? In view of the relatively great social and ethnic homo-

geneity which prevails in Sweden, the existence of such a characteristic seems unlikely, particularly since the difference is just as marked within social group III.

When official labeling takes place, that is, the authorities act, the individual is identified; and selective treatment may well be thought to occur. Nine boys in the Örebro material came in for the most extreme measure, being taken in charge for social care. While one boy was from social group I-II, three came from education group No. 6, three from No. 7, and two could not be placed in a category. No conclusion about discriminatory treatment can be drawn from this information. In Carlson's study the Child Welfare Committee in Stockholm did not in principle take action in about ninety percent of cases for the offenses which constituted the criterion to make them eligible to that investigation (Unga lagöverträdare). Where steps were taken (supervision or social care), the cases were characterized by exceptionally bad home situations or by previous criminality. In a study carried out by Gustav Jonsson (1969) of those taken in charge for social care, social group III is overrepresented in the group. (Gamma 0.36 - the figure being taken from Table 78, page 219 of his book. The connection between social category and being placed in an institution can thus scarcely be regarded as very strong.) Jonsson himself asserts that discriminatory treatment does not seem especially likely and it is the individual's behavior which decides the sort of measure used.

Consequently, no support is given to the hypothesis that any legal measures taken are better explained by social status than by behavior - whether expressed in that extreme form or in the milder formulation that a tendency exists for harsher measures to be taken against individuals of low social status than against others in respect of comparable acts. However, this must be stated with reservations. The data available on the way the authorities act is very meager. Moreover, only young people are concerned.

Laws are drawn up in such a way that the measures to be chosen are based partly on a prognosis made about the individual. Thus, if it could be established that discrimination exists this would not necessarily depend on organizational factors but rather on how law is formulated. Possible discrimination therefore is a matter of the sociology of law, i.e. is a matter of why law has a particular content.

An objection of a fundamental kind may be made against the reasoning given above. It can be claimed that labeling occurred at a much earlier stage and took place selectively so that individuals in the lowest social category were exposed to the greatest risk. Behavior which now results in people being found out and reported thus is held to derive from the earlier labeling. So presented, the labeling concept acquires another, and even vaguer, import which renders demarcation from more traditional theories difficult.¹¹ It seems impossible to refute this objection with the information available.

Williams & Weinberg (1970) have tried to establish how much the deviant himself contributes to the discovery of his behavior. Their study has to do with homosexuality - not in fact a criminal offense in Sweden. But the study is of such interest that it is included here. In their inquiry the authors contacted people in organized associations of homosexuals. Men who had done military service were among eligible respondents. These were divided

¹¹ For this interpretation of the labeling theory, theoretically expressed, see Goldberg, 1973. To put his thought in much simplified form, Goldberg believes that when the infant manifests its impulses it meets in certain cases with negative reactions from its parents. This "parental labeling" gives rise to an unfavorable self-image which the individual will confirm later in life by committing various types of offences. In this theory are to be found elements of psychodynamic theory interwoven with symbolic interactionism. (Pp. 142-164)

into two groups: those who were dishonorably discharged and those who completed their service without dismissal. The first group were discharged because they had been revealed as homosexuals; the others finished service without being discovered. Thirty-two were interviewed in each group, the aim being to establish possible differences between the two groups which might have affected discovery. In the dishonorably-discharged group some had voluntarily declared that they were homosexuals. For various reasons, they wanted to get out of military service, and in that situation the label could be useful. Among those not voluntarily detected, the men's own behavior with regard to their deviance was crucial. Those who took risks by the frequency of their homosexual conduct, in the choice of place for it and of partner, were frequently discovered. On the other hand, those who managed such activities discreetly got away with them. According to the authors of the study, official labeling proved to be related to the "quality and quantity" of the deviant's behavior.

Their research, carried out from the deviant's perspective, corroborates what has emerged previously here. Labeling neither takes place at random nor in a markedly selective manner with bias against certain individuals because of their social status; rather, it is primarily bound up with the individual's illicit behavior.

3.2 Effects of Labeling

Labeling entails an altered interactional structure, limitation of legitimate opportunity and a changed self-image. All this results from a process of social interaction where the labeled individual is treated in accordance with the deviant status newly allotted to him. Together, these factors give rise to deviant careers.

Foster et al. (1972) interviewed 196 boys, aged about fifteen, who had got into trouble because of some kind of criminal behavior. While eighty cases had been dealt

with by the police alone, 115 had been taken to the juvenile court. Interviews with the boys took place in their parents' homes, generally from seven to ten days after their cases had come up. None of the boys said that he had noticed any change in the attitude of his friends because of the legal action, and few mentioned any effects on relationships in their homes. Answers were not affected by the type of measure taken by the authorities. The boys seemed to feel that their parents had a fairly stable perception of them, and that this had not been influenced by the official intervention. Parents who looked on their children as nuisances had the view confirmed, and those who regarded their children as being well behaved thought that the incident was a chance occurrence. The boys were asked if they would have difficulty in finishing their school education because of the official action taken. Ninety-two percent of those still at school considered that it would be no obstacle. Their reason for so believing was that the incident would not become known, and what happened outside school had nothing to do with school. The exceptions were mainly boys who already had problems at school before they got into trouble. There were, however, two areas where many boys felt that the measures against them would exert effect. Fifty-four percent thought that the police would keep a watchful eye on them - not that this was any great inconvenience if they could show that they had no intention of breaking the law again. The other area affected would be future work. Forty percent considered that the incident would have an adverse influence on potential employers. The more serious the measures used with these boys, the more frequent were such views.

So, where those closest to the person are concerned, the hypothesis that labeling brings changed reaction from the environment gets no direct support. Nor did the boys subject to the measures feel that they would have particular problems at school. They did expect, on the other hand, a different attitude from the authorities, and also that their legitimate opportunities might be restricted.

But it should be pointed out here that one parent was present at the majority of interviews, and this may have influenced replies to questions. Moreover, the interviews took place shortly after labeling occurred, and the labeling theorists see the effects of labeling as a result of a process which occurs over time.

Fischer (1972) wished to test the hypothesis that public labeling leads to negative qualities being increasingly ascribed and that this supposedly leads in its turn to intensification of deviant behavior. He used two groups of young people still at school for certain comparisons. Those in the first group were known by the school counselors to be under probation. They were matched with a group not under supervision. The average grades received by the two groups were compared, and the first group was shown to have a somewhat lower average. If they did less well because they were known to have committed some sort of offense, then they ought before being labeled to have had the same grades as members of the second group. Comparison was therefore made of grades before deviant status was assigned to members of the first group. The data showed about the same degree of difference between the groups for average grades. The change in status of those under supervision could not be the cause of their inferior reports. Fischer came to the conclusion against the background of these comparisons that public labeling does not start up a process of discriminative treatment, but rather reflects and perhaps aggravates a process already begun. The ascertained difference between the groups did not commence with labeling but probably had to do with previous adjustment to school. The hypothesis thus gets no support from the data.

An attempt was made by Jensen (1972) to elucidate the connection between criminality and how the person involved conceives of himself. His survey material - young people at school in a district of California - was the same as

that used by Hirschi (1969). The data derives from three sources: the school, an inquiry answered by the young people themselves, and the police. The subjects were asked to what extent they regarded themselves as criminals and whether they believed that others looked on them as such. Their replies were correlated with data as to which of them were known to the police because of one or more infractions. Those registered with the police had a greater sense of being criminals than those who were not. But there was a difference between races. The correlation was stronger for whites (γ 0.47) than for blacks (0.20). This means that the blacks - who, according to the labeling theorists, are more exposed to labeling - had a greater tendency to ignore or deny it. But even for whites the correlation cannot be described as particularly strong. Of those known to have committed two or more offenses (the category with the heaviest offense background), about fifteen percent - equal for both races - often thought of themselves as criminals. However, there were more in this category who never thought of themselves as criminals (28 % for whites and 53 % for blacks). The correlation was about the same between registered offenses and the extent to which the offenders considered that others regarded them as criminals (γ 0.45 for whites and 0.20 for blacks). If it is so that a person's self-image results from how he is treated by other people, then according to the hypothesis the latter correlation ought to be stronger than that between criminality and a person's conception of himself.¹²

¹² This on condition, however, that subjects are at the beginning of what labeling theorists see as deviant careers and so have not yet internalized a deviant identity.

Within class categories the correlation follows a U-shaped curve for blacks. A criminal self-image is more closely correlated with officially registered offenses where parents have had a poor education (not got through high school) or are highly educated (with college degrees) than when their education is between these two poles - completion of high school only, or with some training afterwards. With whites, however, the correlation is closest among those who come from the two lowest educational categories. If we relate this to the labeling theory, the connection lacks significance for blacks, but with whites it operates in the expected direction. As for the degree to which subjects feel that others look on them as criminals, it is not significant from the labeling viewpoint for blacks, but for whites it agrees with the hypothesis. To a greater extent than do upper-class white youths who are known to have committed criminal acts, lower-class ones believe that others regard them as criminals.

The variable "self-image as criminal" was also correlated with the subject's self-esteem, this being operationalized in accord with the degree to which he admitted that he felt himself worthless. The correlation showed the expected tendency - that is to say, those with a criminal self-image had less self-esteem. But the correlation was not especially high (gamma 0.32 for whites and 0.23 for blacks), which means that many young people who believe themselves, or that others consider them, to be criminals are not particularly lacking in self-esteem.

To sum up, then, it may be said that a tendency exists for those who are officially labeled to regard themselves as criminals and to believe that others look on them as such; also, there is a weak tendency for those who have been labeled to possess little self-esteem. Results of the study show that offences against the law and their consequences on a person's self-conception are more complex than expected, and that analysis of the process must be placed in a socio-cultural context.

To a certain limited degree, data support the hypothesis that there is a correlation between official labeling and a criminal self-image, but no more far-reaching conclusion is possible on the relation between official labeling and self-image. These data do not provide a basis for the notion of a causal connection. What does appear is that, generally speaking, the more criminal acts a person has committed, the more likelihood there is of his being known to the authorities. This implies that those who are so known are guilty of more offences than people who are not. A conceivable way of establishing with some certainty whether a causal connection exists between labeling and a criminal self-image would be to compare the self-images of a group where all are labeled with those of a group where no one is, holding constant the level of criminality. Furthermore, the study must be longitudinal in design, so that possible changes in self-image can also be held under control. If those who are officially labeled have developed criminal self-images to a greater extent than those who are not labeled, then this would argue for existence of a causal connection.

Schwarz & Skolnick (1962) investigated the effects of legal stigma on the structure of legitimate opportunities. They did so by studying two groups of different socio-economic status and attempting to establish the consequences for their working situations of contact with the law. The studies used for the two groups were of different design. While that chosen for the group with low socio-economic status (unskilled workers) was of experimental design, that for the high-status group (doctors) sought to estimate the effects of an actual encounter with the law.

In the first part of this study, the authors investigated the unskilled worker's chances of getting works. Four sets of application papers were put together, different only in information about the pretended applicants' previous difficulties with the law. There were 100 sets of papers in all, twenty-five of each kind. In the first type,

each applicant stated that he had been sentenced for assault, in the second that he had been prosecuted for this but acquitted; the third type provided information about the charge and enclosed a certificate from the judge declaring that the suspect was innocent; and the fourth type made no reference at all to the applicant having been in trouble with the law. These sets of papers, twenty-five of each type, were presented to 100 employers. The number of favorable responses to the fourth type denoted the ceiling for the possibility of obtaining work. Findings were that the likelihood of getting work declined as stated contact with the criminal justice system increased. Where no reference was made to trouble with the law, thirty-six percent of responses were favorable; for acquittals with a certificate of acquittal enclosed, the frequency went down to twenty-four percent; for acquittal only it was twelve percent; and it was four percent where conviction was mentioned. As the legal factor was the only thing that varied in the applications, these differences may be attributed to the legal stigma. The hypothesis is thus confirmed from the standpoint of the labeling theory. Legal stigma does decrease chances of getting work, and a simple brush with the law is enough to impair the structure of legitimate opportunities. The theory tacitly assumes, meanwhile, that registered information from the legal apparatus does not reflect any undesirable quality in the individual concerned.

The second part of the study examined what negative effects the prosecution of doctors for wrong treatment might have on their work situations. Reports on doctors taken to court were obtained through a large insurance agency. During the period in question, sixty-nine cases were noted, and fifty-eight of the doctors were interviewed about fifty-seven instances of allegedly wrong treatment. While thirty-eight of the doctors won their cases, nineteen settled out of court and four were convicted. As for the effects on their work situation, fifty-two said that no negative effect existed, and the other

six said that their practices were better after the cases. No deterioration in the situation because of legal stigma could thus be detected.

These investigations do not provide a basis for any general conclusions about the effects of legal stigma on high-status and low-status groups. The reason is that (as the authors themselves point out) the two studies involve different premises. For one thing, the types of behavior involved are dissimilar. While evil intent is assumed in the cases of assault committed by the unskilled workers, for the medical malpractice of the doctors neglect or an act of omission is assumed. Furthermore, the situation underlying the possibilities of getting work is not comparable for the two groups. A factor here is the availability of the manpower offered by one group and the services offered by the other. A surplus of unskilled labor can be counted on, but scarcely of doctors' services. Then too potential employers of the workers had (for the study) information to hand about charges against them, but it cannot be presumed that the doctors' patients - ultimately decisive for his work situation - had any knowledge about legal action against him.

Becker and Lemert, eminent representatives of the labeling perspective, have made studies of two different deviant careers.

Becker produced a model (1963) to explain the origin of habitual marihuana-smoking. His foundation is interviews with fifty smokers of the drug. The method he employs is that of analytic induction, the hypotheses being altered to the extent that they lack validity for the totality of cases examined. This means that the work cannot be classified squarely as an empirical investigation. On the basis of his data, Becker sets out various conditions which must be met for the use of marihuana to be established. These include various sorts of social control which must be overcome.

One thing necessary if a person is to proceed from occasional to habitual smoking is a belief that he can conceal his use of marihuana from those about him. He fears the sanctions which may be invoked if his use of the drug becomes officially known. But gradually, as he acquires more and more experience, the person who will become a habitual smoker realizes that he can keep his use hidden. People who cannot surmount this anxiety are unable to become habitual smokers of marihuana. A further condition is that they can neutralize the notions which generally prevail about drug-addicts. They know the negative qualities usually imputed to the drug-taker. They cannot use marihuana and at the same time accept these stereotype conceptions since they must define themselves in accordance with the stereotypes - that is, as psychopaths, neurotics, etc. Those who are unable to neutralize notions of the kind cannot become habitual marihuana-smokers. The conclusion drawn from these observations is that the person must feel he can avoid being labeled, and if labeling does occur he must have the ability to neutralize the stereotyped image transmitted by labeling - otherwise he cannot become a habitual smoker of marihuana.

The study carried out by Lemert (1972) is of systematic check-forgers. His data derive from interviews with thirty such forgers. Typically, they come from relatively good socio-economic backgrounds and have not been in any early trouble with the law which could account for their criminal behavior. The nature of their offense entails that they lead socially isolated lives, that they must work under pseudonyms and that they are geographically mobile. If and when their false identity is exposed, they must - or should - disappear. This means that ordinarily their stigma will not be confirmed. But their way of life gives rise to an identity crisis which brings a state of tension or of anxiety. In order to resolve this crisis, the forger either acts so that he is arrested and sentenced or passively accepts being caught. It is first through intervention of the law that

his criminal identity is confirmed. The identity he evolves is connected with the nature of his crime rather than with the societal reactions to which he is exposed. Nowhere does Lemert point to any labeling that might have taken place before the commencement of the forger's criminal career.

In the studies of both Becker and Lemert labeling does not appear to be a crucial factor in the genesis of the deviant careers examined. This applies particularly to the marihuana-smoker where according to Becker, labeling has instead had a deterrent effect on deviance. Both the authors deal with specific types of deviant careers. It is not possible to generalize from their studies and claim universal results. We can say, however, that they do not strengthen the theory; rather, they imply a limitation of its validity. It seems remarkable however that two leading exponents of the theory present studies the findings of which contradict the theory.

3.3

Secondary Deviation

Labeling of the primary deviation leads to the secondary deviation. What gives rise to difficulties is not the behavior itself but reaction to it; for the societal reaction functions in such a way that it intensifies deviant behavior. Whatever the causes of the primary deviation, they are afterward without significance. Subsequent deviance is explained entirely as resulting from societal reactions.

No investigation directly relevant to this issue has been included in the material here.¹³ But light can be shed on the hypothesis at a level of considerable compression by using criminal statistics. If the hypothesis possesses general validity, then the proportion of persons suspected of crimes when distributed according to age can be schematically represented as follows:

¹³Olofsson (1971) does, however, present data which indicate that labeling does not increase the likelihood of future deviant behavior.

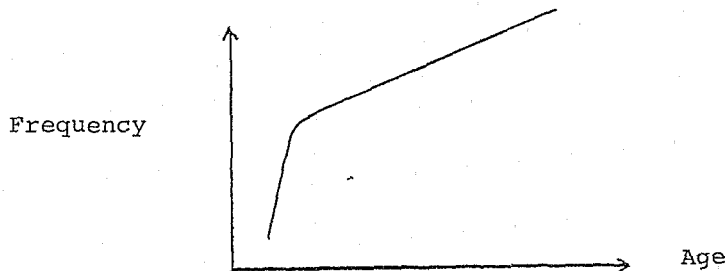


Diagram 2. Proportions of persons suspected of crime by age. Hypothetical distribution in accord with the labeling theory.

Inasmuch as people are subjected to official measures, they become fixed in their criminal roles and express the fixation by criminal behavior. Their number is constantly increased by others against whom various measures are taken, and there is no outflow from their ranks. Consequently, all those who have been the object of some kind of legal action ought in principle to become recidivists.

However, the picture which emerges from statistics (Table 3) is quite different and criminality appears to be a transient phenomenon. The peak is for people in their teens, and the proportion of suspected offenders among them diminishes with increasing age. This means that the great majority of those who get into trouble with the law when they are young do not relapse into crime.

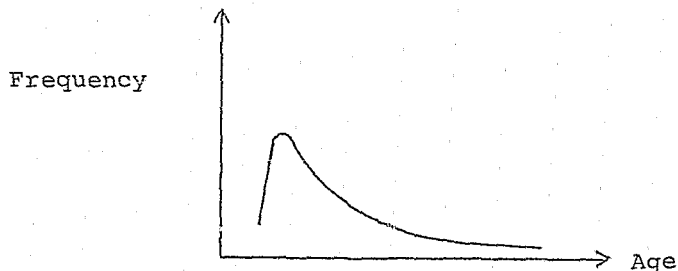


Diagram 3. Proportion of persons suspected of crime by age. Schematic distribution according to criminal statistics.

The hypothesis concerning secondary deviance can be interpreted in various ways. One way is by expressing it in deterministic form and saying that all people who are labeled become recidivists. But, in view of the information supplied by criminal statistics, this interpretation can definitely be discarded. Or the hypothesis can be expressed in milder form: one might say that the probability of continued criminality increases after labeling. This interpretation probably tallies better with the theory. But the milder variant of the hypothesis gives rise to a number of problems. In order to test it, we ought ideally to investigate two groups, alike in their criminality, of which only one has been subjected to labeling. The continued criminality of the two would then be compared. But, apart from considerable methodological problems, practical ones supervene. As the people who most actively commit crimes are those who appear in criminal statistics (see section 3.1), it would doubtless be difficult to find a control group with an initial crime level as high as that of the labeled individuals in the other group. Although in theory labeling is considered to be an independent variable, it ought really to be regarded as an intermediate one. A certain amount of recidivism after labeling could just as well be interpreted resulting from the influence, still active, of the previous deviant behavior and from what lay behind this. Thus, in practice it is very difficult to prove the hypothesis that labeling increases the likelihood of continued criminal behavior.

The statistical series on which introductory reasoning here is based concerns people suspected of crimes. This is an extremely heterogeneous category. While certain of those in it are suspected for the first time, others are previously known to the authorities. In addition, "being suspected" has very different consequences. In a number of cases, inquiries are not pursued, or people are acquitted, or prosecution is dropped, or they suffer some of the penalties that come from being sentenced.

(In principle, all these forms of official labeling are included in the discussion which has been taken up.)

One way of shedding light on the hypothesis that labeling increases the probability of continued deviance is to distinguish between different forms of legal intervention and look at the recidivism rates. Among the sanctions, the more severe measures should be associated with the highest recidivism frequencies. Incarceration, according to the theory, supplies the most favorable conditions for the development of criminal identification, which would imply that imprisonment is the most unfavorable punishment for the avoidance of recidivism.

Carlsson and Olsson (1976) have studied the statistics on recidivism from the Swedish Central Bureau of Statistics. Discussion of these is limited to first offenders who have committed serious offenses this means, essentially, offenses for which penalties are more severe than fines. These first-timers include a group previously handed over to the Child Welfare Authorities under the Child Welfare Act or against whom prosecution for serious crime has been waived. If this group with previous recidivism were excluded, the proportion of those relapsing into crime should be lower. On the whole, bearing in mind what appeared in section 3.1 here, we can expect a fairly high offense background among first offenders sentenced for serious offenses. (Young men who refuse military service constitute a specific exception.) On the whole, too, the risk of being detected and sentenced for a serious offense can be assumed to depend on the intensity of the criminal activity. In any case the risk of being exposed to a new legal intervention would not seem to be lessened. Of those sentenced for the first time for serious offenses in 1966, 30 % recidivated within a five-year period. Taking offenders given prison sentences of from one to four months, we find that 17 % relapsed into crime, while the corresponding figure for those sentenced to five months or more was 34 %. For probation the recidivism

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rate is 37 % and for conditional sentences 11 %.

For those where prosecution was waived, the proportion of recidivists is 45 %. (Ibid.; p.10, Table 1.). This last category is very heterogeneous, and will be omitted from subsequent discussion. (See Ibid.; p.12.). Thus if we exclude conditional sentences, incarceration does not give a higher frequency of recidivism. The reports cover all sentences regardless of offenses. Thus the category of those sentenced to prison includes, for instance, a large group of drunken drivers. Men refusing to do military service constitute another special group. But even if we restrict ourselves to one type of offense the picture is not appreciably altered. If we take offenses against property, the predominant type in reported crime statistics, and the offence under the Penal Code, which leads to the most sentences, we see that for first offenders the recidivism rate is in toto about 30 % following the three penalties under discussion. The proportion for incarceration is 35 %, for probation 39 %, and for conditional sentences 14 %. (Ibid.: p. 20, Table 6A.)

The possibility cannot be ruled out, however, that those classified as first offenders, but who should really be considered recidivists, have been placed on probation more frequently than the rest. This might explain the higher frequency of recidivism for probation.

But it is difficult to raise such an objection where crime against the person is concerned. We would then be forced to assert that the recidivists commit more serious crimes of violence than do the "genuine" first offenders. Recidivism rates for crime against the person are 27 % after imprisonment, 35 % after probation and 10 % after conditional sentences. (Ibid.: p. 70, Table 6 A). The picture which emerges remains unchanged.

In order to interpret these recidivism rates, we must have a clear idea of the reasons why various penalties are imposed. Essentially, choice of sanction is based on considerations of individual and general prevention. When incarceration is imposed on first offenders, it is for reasons of general prevention. The choice between probation and a conditional sentence is, on the other hand, made with reference to individual prevention - that is to say, with a prognosis in mind. Thus, where an offender is sentenced to prison it is the offense which is given importance, but with the other two penalties the individual and situational factors are decisive. Where an act is judged to have been especially grave, imprisonment is used. Where the act is regarded as less serious but the prognosis not particularly good, probation is imposed.

According to labeling theory, it is society's reaction which is central and which explains the subsequent course of events. But in fact the difference between probation and a conditional sentence is not very great and it can scarcely account for the marked disparity between the recidivism rates of these sanctions. True, probation may be combined with institutional treatment, but this occurs in fewer than ten percent of cases and therefore cannot affect the outcome to any considerable extent. One might raise an objection here and claim that, since those with favorable prognoses receive conditional sentences, their lower recidivism results from a "self-fulfilling prophecy", that is to say, a labeling effect. One could, however, just as well assert that those who impose the sentences make fairly good assessments about prognosis. The fact remains that there is not much genuine difference between the two penalties. And the negative effect which, according to the theory, prison sentences are expected to produce in the form of a high proportion of recidivists could not be confirmed. Thus, the hypothesis that the more severe measures lead to a high proportion of recidivists gains no support either. This in its turn renders less

credible the assertion that labeling increases the likelihood of continued deviance. This conclusion is based on the fact that first offenders who are given prison sentences - and who, according to the theory, should be most affected by labeling - do not show a higher proportion of recidivists than first offenders placed on probation.

4

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It has not been possible to find the massive empirical support for the theory which might have been expected in view of the force with which it has prevailed. Many of its postulates have evidently been taken as self-evident truths needing no verification. Perhaps the absence of empirical elucidation has made it easier to accept the theory.

Two myths closely connected with the theory can be rejected with certainty. The first is that the individual's social status alone constitutes the decisive factor for labeling.¹⁴ The other is that, once labeled, a person is fixed in his deviant role.

As for the more sophisticated interpretation of the theory, it stands on extremely shaky ground. Only a very few investigations could be found which deal with any of the theory's central hypotheses. This is probably bound up with the anti-positivist attitude of the labeling theorists. By taking a critical stance toward traditional methods, they have, ironically enough, undermined their own position. An important contributory cause of their doing so is the vague formulation of the theory. Concepts are defined so vaguely that it is difficult to give them a more precise content.

¹⁴With the reservation that this conclusion applies to "traditional" crimes.

If the theory is to be fruitful, its concepts must be given less ambiguous definition. In particular the concept of labeling itself, as it is of such central importance, should be more exactly analysed and defined. Instead of the sweeping formulations now employed, what should be specified is under what conditions a certain type of labeling produces a certain type of effect. Furthermore, the theory must be formulated in a fully coherent way so that the theoretical part can be followed up by empirical studies. The question should, moreover, be taken up as to whether labeling always has the effect of intensifying deviant behavior in some way. Labeling can be expected to exert a deterrent influence as well. If this be so, it will be necessary to abandon the narrow social determinism which has become so highly characteristic of the theory. This would mean developing the existentialist vein to be found in the approach. (See the account of Becker's career model in section 3.2, also Part I here.) In its present form, the theory constitutes more of a hindrance than a help for making a worthwhile analysis of asocial behavior.

Appendix

This work is based mainly on articles published in some of the major Americal sociological and criminological journals. The selection was made with a bibliography by Vasoli and Maiolo, The Labeling Perspective (1975) as starting-point. It appears to be an exhaustive bibliography of works published in English up to the end of 1974. While going through it and checking the articles listed with a table of contents of the periodicals covered, together with reading the articles themselves, I gained the impression that no very strict definition was applied to see whether a work should be classified as belonging to the perspective.

A total of 427 articles, published in 138 periodicals, are included in the bibliography. A conspicuous number of these come from psychiatry. Nearly a third of the periodicals surveyed are psychiatric, which makes them the dominant type. But if we look at the number of articles published, purely sociological periodicals account for the largest portion: over a third of the articles. However, many of them are studies directly relevant to psychiatry. About half (73) of the periodicals covered by the bibliography contained only one article. Against this background, together with the fact that it was primarily a criminological problem that had to be treated, it was clear that a random sample of articles would not suffice as a way of proceeding; the psychiatric element could be expected to be excessive. Instead, four of the main sociological journals were examined: Americal Sociological Review (24 articles), American Journal of Sociology (12), Sociometry (10) and Social Problems (60) - a total of 106 articles. Three criminology publications were also gone through: Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology (up to the end of 1973, Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science - 11 articles), Law and Society Review (4) and British Journal of Criminology (7) - a total of 22 articles.

In all this makes 128 articles - about a third of those included in the bibliography. Some articles not listed in the bibliography have also been examined; they were published after the bibliography was completed.

The contents of 54 articles were judged to be theoretical as they are mainly devoted to discussion of concepts and formulation of the theory. The remaining 74 articles were more or less empirical in character. A striking number of the studies pertain to psychiatry: 22 included in the material here are concerned chiefly with factors related to the committal of patients to mental institutions. Various "screening processes" do in fact constitute a recurrent subject. As for criminological issues, some ten of the studies had to do with questions of official societal reactions and the relation of these to criminal behavior. Over twenty of the articles gone through were judged to have a bearing on the matters treated in this report. The principle adopted when making selection was to look for studies concerned with the three main hypotheses regarded as central to the theory. (See section 2.)

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