

Criminology labeling theory

Law



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Ashley's mother had every right to be worried. In July 2006 Simpson took notes of another phone call from her not long after a man who was suspected of murdering Ashley had been released on the word of a jailhouse informant who had said that Ashley had stolen drugs from this person. Not long after that, Ashley's mother was told that no charges would be laid and to this day the murder has remained unsolved. Ashley's mother died on November 19, 2006, after falling ill after the death of her daughter.

Becker (1963) describes labeling theory as describing a situation where a group of people who fail to act within the accepted norms of society is ostracized, isolated, and in some cases persecuted because of their behavior. Using the term "outsider" Becker (1983) explains that although individuals may act out in certain ways and that this can be considered primary deviance, that many of these people become involved in secondary deviance or criminal behavior. According to Becker (1963) while the involvement in primary deviance may be unintentional or even accidental, as a result of the isolation and labeling the descent into secondary deviance occurs more as a choice to act out against the very people who are ostracizing them.

The reference to labeling theory may be oblique in the Simpson (2007) story, but it is evident all the same. Originally the police in the case did treat the death of Ashley with relative importance; they were overworked and understaffed but they still put in some decent hours trying to locate witnesses and suspects. This behavior on the part of the police changed however when the suspicion of drug use was brought into the case. From that moment Simpson (2007) makes it clear that the police felt that there was no point in pursuing the case any further. Simpson writes, " On September 8th <https://assignbuster.com/criminology-labeling-theory/>

she called again. She told me about an emotional meeting she had at the district attorney's office after the charge was dropped. She felt prosecutors saw Ashley as a drug addict and possibly a prostitute who had gotten herself killed" because of her actions.

Becker (1963) noted that the enforcement of society's rules is an enterprising act and that the enforcement of a rule occurs when those that want a rule enforced, usually because they stand to make some form of personal gain, then bring the infraction of the rule to the attention to the public. He goes on to explain that while law enforcers may feel a small degree of ethical satisfaction in maintaining law and order, that for the most part, they will only pursue a case where the officer concerned garners respect for his position in what he does. It would appear that for Ashley Plunkett, the need to force others to come to justice for her murder was something that the police officials involved saw no point in pursuing when they labeled the young woman, who was a solo mother as a drug addict and prostitute. So because of the labels invoked by the police, in this case, Ashley's killer is still walking around, free to commit murder again.