

What are the pros
and cons of applying
stereotypes to identify
potential criminals...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The paper "Effect of Stereotypes on Potential Criminals" is an impressive example of a term paper on social science. Criminal behavior is an act violating social norms according to Sociologists-Criminal act can also be an act that violates the laws of the land in a formal setting according to the oxford dictionary of law. Criminology is a violation of socially constituted laws, norms or values.

Many theories have been put forward to explain the occurrence of criminal acts. Some of these theories include conflict theory, structural-functional theory, symbolic interactions, and labeling theory. In this paper, I will analyze criminal behavior based on stereotypes as having been put forward by sociological theorists. I will discuss the pros and cons of applying stereotypes to identify a potential criminal.

Lombroso had put forward a theory of crime and deviant. Lombroso suggested ways in which society can identify a criminal based on genetic, biological and psychological characteristics. Lombroso had suggested some genetically and biological characteristics which identify a criminal, for example, a person with six fingers left-handed eyebrows that meet at the bottom, squinted eye to be criminals.

Lombroso theory has been supported by many sociological theorists like Howard Becker and Emile Durkheim who had similar findings though in different perspectives. Based on Lombroso theory it is possible for police or community to victimize individuals based on the characteristics given by Lombroso yet they are innocent. This has been so in the U. S where African Americans are often perceived as criminals as seen in the case that

<https://assignbuster.com/what-are-the-pros-and-cons-of-applying-sterotypes-to-identify-potential-criminals-and-do-the-costs-outweigh-the-benefits-or-vice-versa/>

appeared in the Kentucky Supreme Court in 2002. In the court, the police argued that the man, black, must be the one who had sold cocaine to state's informant since he sounded black. The stereotype that it's African Americans who engage in crime has led to increasing of crime causes. The young African Americans argue that they are perceived as criminals even when they are innocent (Randall, 88; Irving 63). The occurrence has led to many young African Americans who are potential criminals to engage in crime (Schissel, 71; Thornberry, 14; Duffy and Scotts, 29).

Empirical studies have been done by sociologists to verify the truth of the theory and it has been found that there are individuals who possess the given characteristics yet they are morally upright. Media has played a role in strengthening certain stereotypes by highlighting crimes committed by a certain group of people and emphasize how police die in the line of duty (Gray, Fishman, and Gruyter, 21; Oliver, 88; Weitzer, 11).

Lombroso theory of description of criminals formed the basis of development of labeling theory. The theory of labeling focuses on the linguistic tendency of individuals to act in accordance with how society has described them based on norms and stereotype. Howard Becker has put forward ways in which individuals adhere to the labeling and become delinquent or criminals. For example, when a teenager is told by everyone that he resembles a thug; the particular teenager can even begin by picking other people's items like books with the notion " after all everyone perceives me as a thief". Psychologically, the teenager is oriented to criminal behaviors due to labeling and this is an adverse effect on society.

When a potential criminal is described or labeled a criminal according to

<https://assignbuster.com/what-are-the-pros-and-cons-of-applying-sterotypes-to-identify-potential-criminals-and-do-the-costs-outweigh-the-benefits-or-vice-versa/>

Becker, it becomes very hard to reform the individual through imprisonment and rehabilitation facilities since the individual already perceives that the society already perceives him like a criminal so whether he/she changes, whenever a criminal act occurs the society will suspect him first. An empirical study on criminal maniacs or prison maniacs has given data on the theory which verifies the theory. However, there has been the stereotype that women are harmless and this has led to an increase in crime since crime happen unnoticed (Daly and Maher, 54).

Lombroso theory on human characteristics has drawn debates from different sources on its reality. Most sociologists have criticized it arguing it has no empirical evidence and has no basis, it only misleads the society. Karl Marx has argued that stereotypes, as put forward by Lombroso about individuals' characteristics, are not really the cause of potential criminals. Rather according to Karl Marx, a conflict between the 'have' and 'have not' has led to rampant increase of potential criminals. The 'haves' possess means of production and they exploit the 'have not' through the payment of very low wages. The poor are not paid their worth according to the work they do. Exploitation, therefore, has led to rampant increase of potential criminals as opposed to biological and physical characteristics. The argument on physical characteristics been used as the bias of identifying criminals has drawn attention from the public too because of harassment of innocent individuals. In response to this, in 1996, the vice president of America produced a statement in the White House Commission on Aviation Safety and security where he condemned stereotyping passengers as potential criminals because instead of increasing safety it reduces safety. The passengers were

<https://assignbuster.com/what-are-the-pros-and-cons-of-applying-sterotypes-to-identify-potential-criminals-and-do-the-costs-outweigh-the-benefits-or-vice-versa/>

being detained, questioned and searched as if they were potential criminals and it threatened privacy and safety of passengers. The president during the Amendment of Safety laws argued that the best criteria to identify potential criminal should be based on the evidence available. The president further said that individuals should not be suspected as potential criminals based on biological and physical characteristics since they cannot change themselves. There before so many individuals had been detained as potential criminals due to physical characteristics and this had led to many complaints (Gregory, 1996; Mathew, 11).

In conclusion, the use of stereotypes has had both positive and negative effects on society. Identifying criminals based on stereotypes have led to a lot of conflicts especially between law enforcers and the victims. It has also led to increasing crime rate to prove the description given. Others have gone contrary to the given stereotype so as to prove the inaccuracy of the stereotypes (Ashmore and Longo, 21). Activists have condemned the use of stereotypes to condemn people (Schissel, 43).