

Deviance, labeling theory, secondary labeling and their effects on society

[Society](#)



Deviance can be defined as anything that flouts social norms and values. As an example we can take the Ten Commandments, that other than being a religious document is also a set of regulations to assist in creating a comfortable social climate for all people in a social environment. Simple laws such as not to steal, commit adultery, murder or abuse, are set in order to make sure that all involved are protected from possible harm. When one individual decides to break these regulations the balance is out of kilter.

In this essay we will define and explain the terms: deviance, secondary deviance and labeling theory and attempt to ascertain their importance and effects within a social stratum. Deviance is, as mentioned above, a conscious disregard for the norms and values specifically designed to protect the public. Deviance is often seen in terms of juvenile delinquents who by means of deliberate or forced action break the laws that protect the public or community. Deviance takes its form in a number of ways that are socially relevant such as drug abuse, rape, murder, theft and armed robbery.

The father of labeling theory, Howard Becker believed, however, that sufficient rehabilitation of said criminals leads to another set of problems altogether. " Being a "criminal" becomes a person's master status. It controls the way they are identified in public. Others do not consider their other statuses -- that of spouse, parent, or worker -- only that they are first and foremost a criminal. " In this instance, as Becker believes the identity of the person becomes that of a criminal immediately after they are found guilty and have a criminal record.

The person therefore undergoes an identity change and a moral crisis. The concept of self becomes divided by the Me and I being shifted from an integrated whole, to two very different people. One person is the 'inherent good' and one is the 'public bad', yet they are the same person. If one looks at crimes such as gang violence, one sees a specific stigma, one of fear by the public and another of status by those involved. The need to belong becomes greater than the need to be right. Those that grow up without an effective social purpose (ie.

Those that do not have parents or grow up in inefficient parental guidance) search for meaning elsewhere. Those that are not seen as acceptable by their general environment will almost certainly find acceptance in a gang or crime syndicate. This is because it grants them some degree of importance and power. These individuals derive power out of others fear. In terms of other abuses of status, rape is a particularly devastating form of deviance where debate surrounding public labelling can be touchy to say the least.

A crime of this nature, regardless of the age of the perpetrator is one that is on the increase today. Theoretically, justice should seek to curb violent and deviant behaviour, but as Becker believes, it often undermines the rehabilitation process because once the individual has been labelled as a criminal they tend to be seen as such years after the punishment has been served and inhibits their ability to earn a decent, respectable income once they have left prison. It makes sense that when a convicted criminal applies for a job after they have served their sentence, the label of 'criminal' is already recorded.

Naturally, the prospective employer is dubious as to whether to employ them or not. In relationships too, it becomes difficult for a spouse, friend or family member to trust the person again, leaving the convict alone and jobless. There is an immediate loss of self esteem, social concept, self-concept and value to society. Becker and his fellow symbolic interactionists believe that this is a self-fulfilling prophecy which is nearly impossible to break. More importantly, is the consequence of this labelling.

As an example, we could use 11 September 2001, otherwise known worldwide as Ground Zero, to illustrate a social problem such as labelling is responsible for. After the Twin Towers bombing, it became known that the perpetrators were Muslim fundamentalists and possible al-Qa'ida insurgents. Once this became known, Muslim men were searched at airports and appeared to be discriminated against by general public. This is neither party's fault in the end, as fear is a defence mechanism that the public drew up in order to protect themselves from further threat.

Also apparent though, is that not all Muslims are potential mass murderers or are genocidal. The same becomes apparent on another macro-level with the Germans and Adlof Hitler. That not every German is a Nazi may momentarily have escape some families of victims. The real problem, however with labelling of deviants, is that since they are unable to regain social status and unable acquire employment, they are forced back into deviant behaviour. This is termed secondary deviance. The self-fulfilling prophecy as mentioned before becomes apparent.

With no job or social support, theft seems to be the first port of call in order to survive. In order to do this, the person may be forced to join another gang <https://assignbuster.com/deviance-labeling-theory-secondary-labeling-and-their-effects-on-society/>

and the snowball starts to roll. It is extremely difficult to re-integrate a criminal with a record back into society, so where does the answer lie. If it were possible to change the attitudes of the general public, it could be the difference between an integrated society and a dysfunctional one. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the individual will choose to keep their name clear after they are released.

In conclusion it can be seen that deviance, secondary deviance and labelling are all integral parts of societal functioning, but don't necessarily yield any solution to the growing trend of deviant behaviour among juvenile delinquents. The process remains as follows: due to some fate of upbringing the person is initiated into a deviant form of behaviour; they are labelled delinquents, criminals and rehabilitants; they are unable to change their status due to criminal record, so they revert to deviant behaviour in order to survive. It would seem that the only appropriate solution or cure for this deviant culture, lies in the upbringing.