

Applying labeling theories to capturing the friedmans



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Applying Labeling Theories to Capturing the Friedmans Introduction One of the theoretical assumptions applied in criminology maintains that crime causes precede the interventions of criminal justice. However, it is prudent to understand that labeling theories put forward by Howard Becker, Erving Goffman, and Edwin Lemert argue contrary to the aforementioned statement. In this case, social deviance responses including defining and “labeling” individuals as criminals pose a worsening effect on criminality. Capturing the Friedmans is an exemplary film that highlights the perspectives of the labeling theories, presenting conflicting and multiple accounts on two characters Jesse and Arnold, whom the media, criminal justice system, and community label as criminals and deviants.

Part One Labeling theories established by Howard Becker, Erving Goffman, and Edwin Lemert have a close relation to symbolic interaction and social construction analysis. These theories mainly assert that deviance has no inherence to an action; rather, focus should be put on society’s tendency to label certain individuals as deviant based on standard cultural norms (Posners, 2009). Concern from these theories is based on behavior of individuals and self-identity may be influenced or determined by the phrases classifying or describing them.

They are associated with stereotyping and self-fulfilling prophecy concepts. Categorizations or unwanted descriptions; including those related to mental disorder, disability, or deviance, should be rejected since their true nature is considered as mere “labels” (2009). Edwin Lemert professionalized as a

sociologist who is credited with the development of the “secondary deviance” concept.

Primary deviance refers to the experienced associated with overt behavior such as drug addiction. In contrast, Lemert maintained that the secondary deviance concept was a way of dealing behavior condemnation by society. Lemert was able to identify how deviant acts related to social acts due to social cooperation. Lemert’s studies in drug addiction yielded an observation on a very subtle yet powerful working force. Besides economic and social disruptions associated with physical drug addictions, Lemert identified intellectual processes justifying the behavior through working with the individual’s identity. While Lemert takes credit for introducing the “secondary deviance” concept, Howard Becker is responsible for developing it. His development of the concept first began with a description of an individual’s process of adopting a deviant role by studying marijuana smokers.

In his finding, Becker was able to establish that the social groups normally develop deviance by creating rules that when broken leads to deviance. Ultimately, applying these rules to certain people classifies them as outsiders. From this viewpoint therefore, deviance is not based on the quality of the action committed by the individual, but a repercussion of applying other sanctions and rules to the “offender”.

Ervin Goffman is perhaps the one who contributed most to the labeling theory. Unlike other sociologists who focused on the process of deviant identity adoption, Goffman focused on the ways through which individuals

managed their identity and controlled information associated with it. The current society has prioritized normalcy demand. Stigmas found in people today are not based on religious prohibitions, rather; they are based on society's demand for normalcy.

The premise described by the phrase "normal person" may be derived from the human medial approach for treating all society members equally.

Goffman established that deviants segment their worlds into three. These include forbidden locations where being discovered implies danger, locations where people of that nature are tolerated, and places where an individual is exposed without the need for concealment or dissimulation. Part Two

Capturing the Friedmans is an example of a film that brings into light the perspectives of the labeling theories; through its presentation of conflicting and often multiple accounts that render the truth of its characters elusive where the media, criminal justice system, and community labels individuals – Arnold and Jesse – as criminals and deviants. The film leaves the viewers to piece their event versions with Friedman's reality puzzle with no closure (Rafter and Brown, 2011).

Reality in this film is not clarified, as the viewer believes certain things to be true and disregards others. This approach illuminates the common aspect behind the labeling theories put forward by Howard Becker, Erving Goffman, and Edwin Lemert. In this case, reality social constructions are meanings developed by social interactions. Further examination of the film reveals clear ways through which the accusation and conviction of Jesse and Arnold reveals Becker's, Goffman's, and Lemert's propositions in labeling. These events are triggered when an inspector becomes suspicious that Arnold is <https://assignbuster.com/applying-labeling-theories-to-capturing-the-friedmans/>

using mail to exchange pornographic material. A raid on Arnold's home indeed reveals pornographic magazines.

Immediately, police begin to question Arnold's classmates as soon as they learn of his computer studies. Investigations into the matter yielded evidence alleging Arnold Friedman's criminal engagement in child sexual abuse. With the limelight drawn to the allegations made to Arnold and his brother Jesse, the concept of labeling manifests itself. In this case, society regards heterosexuality as the proper normality, and this aspect is based on Goffman's theory. Arnold and Jesse are yet to be proven guilty, but society has already labeled them as child molesters or sexual abusers (Rafter and Brown, 2011).

The evidence available does not suffice to suggest that both Arnold and Jesse had any motives of molesting the children. In this case, this film applies to Becker's, Goffman's, and Lemert's concept that people are sometimes labeled names and identities when they have not been proven guilty.

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