

Examine the relationship between deviance and labeling essay sample



The relationship between deviance and labelling is partly based on the view of the stereotypical criminal. This stereotype suggests a white, working class, male as a deviant, making them a 'suspect' before they've even committed a deviant act. However, whether an act is labelled as deviant depends on who commits the act, where and when it's committed, and how it is interpreted – and the label the individual is given as a result. Functionalists label the typical criminal as a young, working class male. They then produce theories based on this label to explain this crime, and therefore end up skewed or distorted stats – suggesting that their stereotype of the typical criminal does in fact commit the most crime, when this is perhaps not the reality. Functionalist Merton argues that problem of deviance stems from the structure of society. He claims different classes within society have unequal access to legitimate pathways. For example, the working class have less access to the best education, and therefore develop a sense of anomie – this label leads the working class to feel pressured into turning to illegitimate pathways, highlighting the self fulfilling prophesy. Building on Merton's theory is Cohen.

He believes everybody wants status; a feeling of self-worth in the eyes of others. In terms of delinquency and labelling, he argues working class, in particular boys, are inadequately socialised because of deficiencies in working class culture, therefore labelling them as failures. Because of this frustration at their low status in the eyes of, for example, their teachers, they then go on to reject education, and instead misbehave. This status frustration at being negatively labelled leads them to a delinquent subculture; in their desire to gain status, they turn to deviancy, a positive

subculture in the eyes of their peers, where they will then gain status from them instead. As well as gaining this status from their peers, this also hits back at the mainstream values that labelled them. The study Willis' Lads highlighted this point. Cloward and Ohlin also build on Merton. They concluded there was an illegitimate opportunity structure than ran parallel to the legitimate opportunity structure. According to Cloward and Ohlin, those involved in delinquency depended on the access available to the three subcultures that formed the illegitimate opportunity structure.

These subcultures are based upon the label of the typical criminal, the young, working class, male, and its working class values. The first of these subcultures is the criminal subculture, an area with an adult criminal network, primarily long established working class areas. The second is the conflict subculture, when access to criminal subculture is blocked, so the individuals would instead form gangs based on turf and territory, again, labelled as a working class trait. The final is the retreatist subculture, for those who have failed in crime and violence, so turn to petty crime, drugs and alcohol. The phrase ' dropout' describes the people in this subculture, a word usually used to label the working class. Again, this may be an example of the self-fulfilling prophesy; if the delinquents are labelled, and this is the expected path they'll take, then perhaps they'll do it anyway. Interactionist Becker developed the labelling theory to investigate societal reaction, power, and why behaviour is labelled as deviant. He focuses not on deviant behaviour itself, but society's reaction to it. Becker claims some people have the power to label deviancy; these moral entrepreneurs have the resources and power to ensure their view of deviance is incorporated into the law.

However, the effect of labelling someone as deviant is that their deviant behaviour is amplified – perhaps again a product of the self fulfilling prophesy. Becker also uses the concept of power in his labelling theory. Some groups are labelled as deviant while others are not, primarily young, working class, males are initially labelled as deviant, whereas others are given more of the benefit of the doubt. Also, areas that are predominantly working class as opposed to affluent areas are labelled as delinquent and criminal, even if perhaps that is not always the case. Labelling theory suggests that the law is enforced selectively by police, and that the working class have less power and fewer resources to deflect a deviant label or criminal label, as well as being more vulnerable to arrest. ‘Sus Laws’ give police permission to stop and search people, and statistics show afro-Caribbean are seven times more likely to get stopped. This again shows how labelling can make an individual a suspect before he or she has even committed a deviant act. Becker believes labelling lead to amplification of deviance, and that labelling leads to a master status, an identity through which the individual is viewed. If he or she is already viewed as a criminal, it may be they conform to that label anyway.

If an individual’s master status is a deviant, he or she will look to other deviants. To escaped being viewed as an outsider, instead he or she will join with other deviants to create more deviant behaviour. Deviance is therefore amplified, primarily because of a label. However, labelling can work in the favour of those labelled. Becker’s concept of career contingencies refers to the fact that the deviant may rid of /her master status, and may be offered a job that isn’t deviant, may get married, and so on. This redirection back into

normal life is a way the deviant can escape from deviancy. It can also be argued Becker's labelling theory is too deterministic, and interpretivists argue people don't respond predictably, and so will respond to labels differently. The media is another factor in the amplification of deviance as a result of labelling. Jock Young's study of hippie marijuana smokers in the 80's is a prime example. As is Cohen's 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics' study of the Mods and Rockers Youth Culture. He concluded exaggerated coverage by the media of Mods and Rockers sensitised society about the situation, as well as Mods and Rockers themselves.

By exaggerating the fighting between Mods and Rockers, police therefore felt in order to escape criticism, they have to act upon the situation.

However, its moral panics and media sensitisation like this that makes the situation worse. And it all boils down to labelling; by the media coverage exaggerating the 'war' between the two 'sides', it left society wanting to become of one or the other, to be labelled as a Mod or a Rocker. And because of this sensitisation, police reacted at the slightest thing, causing a lot more trouble than the initial conflict. It's due to deviancy amplification like this that results in labels being cast, and the self-fulfilling prophesy being realised. Ethno-methodologist Cicourel's idea of a deviant is based upon a set of taken for granted assumptions. He suggested because the middle class don't fit the taken for granted assumption – the stereotype – of the typical deviant, they can escape their conviction. Cicourel's idea that 'justice is negotiable' is a prime example of the taken for granted assumption; because the stereotypical deviant is a white, working class, male, this

stereotype is not portrayed by middle class, who can therefore escape conviction because of this label.

Cicourel's three stages of delinquency also revert back to labelling; the first stage for the police is stop and search, a decision based on what they see as 'suspicious'. 'Suspicious' refers to their idea of 'bad areas'; inner-city, low income areas, with their idea of 'typical delinquents' - if the appearance, language or personality fits this picture, then they're more likely to be arrested. The second stage is again based on a label - the suspect is likely to be charged if their background corresponds with the label of the stereotypical deviant. This background includes the suspect coming from broken homes, low income families and exhibiting bad attitudes to name a few. Cicourel found a close relationship between deviant behaviour and social class, primarily because of labels and the self fulfilling prophecy. The final stage is whether or not to charge the suspect. When middle class juveniles were arrested, they were less likely to be charged as they did not fit the standard picture - label - of the delinquent.

Perhaps it's that their parents are better able to negotiate on their behalf, promising cooperation with officers, assuring them their child is remorseful. Middle classes are labelled as being respectable and reasonable, from nice neighbourhoods who look forward to a rosy future for their child. Middle class juveniles are often defined as ill, as straying from the path of righteousness, as cooperative, as having a chance of reforming, as opposed to the working class delinquent label of criminal, committed to wrongdoing, being a 'born loser', and so on. This therefore explains the link, according to Cicourel, between labelling and deviance. In conclusion, there appears to be a strong <https://assignbuster.com/examine-the-relationship-between-deviance-and-labeling-essay-sample/>

relationship between deviance and labelling. Although deviance obviously initially exists, it would appear that the labelling of the stereotypical criminal and the amplification of the deviance that follows, fuels further deviant behaviour. The self-fulfilling prophesy appears to play a role in this, however, this prophesy stems from the label.