

# Impact of the labelling perspective on criminological theory



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Q3: ' By drawing upon the insights of Symbolic Interactionism, the labelling perspective highlights the importance of how people respond to events and the manner in which responses shape self-perceptions.' Discuss, with particular reference to the impact of the labelling perspective on criminological theory.

Labelling perspective has negative and positive impact on society and individual. Labelling perspective and symbolic interactionism are inter-dependent theories. They represent a few theories where it is often categorized as social reaction theory where it focuses on society's reaction towards the deviant and not the person of deviant. It's the sociology of deviancy. However, the labelling theorists state that their theory never cause criminality directly but they elaborate the situation around the criminals and the possibilities of their criminal occurrence. It is called sociology of deviancy.

Labelling came up to UK only in 1960's from Europe from the influence of Elvis Presley and rock n roll culture. Here Frederick Thrasher has quoted in his juvenile gangs that official labeling gives a negative impact on youths. Later on the issue of the labeled person will be and behave according to the description was brought about by Frank Tannenbaum (1938).

Interactionist theory is of that a person's life is influenced by those being interacted even though the culture, family background and genetics has influence on one's life. So the interactions could influence one's lifestyle through symbolizing and labeling him.

Labeling perspective focuses on society and individual. Lemert says that problem arises when individual is labeled and he identifies the label. Becker says that the society determine the rule for criminality and deviance. It is applied to those who disobey those rules and labeled as criminals. So those who are labeled are alienated from society.

A few issues has to be look thoroughly as in how the person of labeled being analysed, the reaction to the label, whats the affect in the circle they live, whether the labeling has changed their self image. First of all, it has to be clearly seen, what are the behaviours that is catogarized as criminals. The usage of officials in power on labeling and whats the effect that it has on individual ?

Labelling would give a person negative impact internally which affects his behaviour. Becker however disagreed that labelling perspective had caused deviance. It does not mean ones he steals, he would steal again.

According to him, the internal changes to an offender are due to the people and to whom they interact to. However there was also idea brought about by Matsueda that a person's own view of himself is affected due to the way others treat and view them. This is shows it is an impact of labelling.

Labelling perspective is divided into two; primary deviance and secondary deviance. First ones is of a person who had break the norm and rules yet is not bothered of the labelled that has been stamped on his by the officials or society. This is done through justification of the crime They are those who does not react to the societal reaction of labelling. Theorists also say that these people are falsely labelled. This obviously does not mean that the <https://assignbuster.com/impact-of-the-labelling-perspective-on-criminological-theory/>

offender is innocent but he had disagreed to accept the fact that the act is criminal and he is a criminal. Society disapproves his behaviour and categorize as less-worthy ones. Yet the offender does not bother of the label. However, the negative impact of the labelling is that it might turn the offender into the form that he had been labelled by the society.

The latter ones, secondary deviance is of a behaviour that is due to social reaction and self image. Yet theorists say that labelling is the sole cause for all. Here the labelling is done by the prison, people of power such as police and similar institutions. The society determines the label on the individuals by looking at the people of power's reaction. The labelled ones are viewed differently in the society. The impact this; some will accept the label and some has no idea of what is his image and just accept the label. The image is brought about to one by the social interaction is negative impact.

Theorist of opinion that labelling by officials does not give much impact to individuals but the stigmatisation from the society which he is belong to or respect. If the society knows about the label, it will affect the way people treat them. Usually criminal label is an overriding label. For example, the manager currently labelled as a thief. The labelled would think he is a thief more compared to he is a manager. So this does not only give a negative impact to the individual but the society. They would start to reject the presence of the labelled among them.

The labelling negatively impacts his career as in his refusal to continue working due to the label. Society sees the labelled as less worthy than others

of society. The labelling goes on negatively for the offender even in the society, friends, relatives and law abiding society.

At last when everyone segregates them, they force themselves to be in the companion of other law – breakers who accept them. Here even the innocent labelled person will learn new crimes and criminal values as part of association with them. The drug user who is eliminated from society now will indulge in other crimes as well. “ If they do once, they ‘ may’ repeat” is the term police solely rely on, where it worsen the criminality when they charge the offenders when a crime similar to what occurred earlier in the particular area.

The word ‘ may’ will lead those action and reactions unavoidable. Though some offenders will realize the mistakes done and get back to the normal life. It is still argued that the labelling internalised the individuals and criminality arises due to the social reaction to them.

The worst impact created by labelling perspective is through prison. It is a dorm for the offenders to learn new crimes and increase the level of criminality as they are alienated from the society. These offenders just accept the label of criminal without hesitation while in prison as they believe they are unable to change the label. So this provokes them to commit more crime on their release. Clearly, that the labelling had give a negative impact as in increasing the crime rate. However the positive impact do arise as in some of offenders will not accept the label as their actions were not genuinely criminal and some would try to lead a normal life and not reoffend again.

Whatever their reasons may be, but the society are not ready to accept them in the society due to the stigmatisation. The negative impacts of labelling continue as in the name of ex-prisoner. He faces the problem of getting a job, acceptance into society and police surveillance. Though he had moved out of the label of criminal, the society refuses to accept him in their community. Theorists had been arguing that the process of labelling would lead to criminality is the same as of social control to law abiding society. The labelling and control would lead to one to redefine himself and accept the labels.

The impact of labelling is not only on individuals but groups. One group label the other as deviant will make the other ones alienated from the society. More crime is done by the group when the excluders block their social interactions. Current crime shows they have accepted the label and is not bothered of it.

Controlling and labelling has created a malicious circle for the criminals. Young commented on a marijuana issue which involves Marijuana Tax Act 1937 where the labelling of media has worsened the criminality. They are negatively labelled where more control from police is provided. It made the offenders treated injustice and wanted to revenge back by acting against the intolerant society. This is criminality increases in society due to labelling.

Labelling is not of is not a theory of causation but of interpreting what happens. It is not that the labelling create certain type of behaviours but rather they and their effects may lead any offenders to choose one of it as a path for criminality. Though these explanations is not strong enough to

satisfy the accusation of labelling has a negative impact, in theory and practical it has always been viewed as a non causative theory.

Next is an offender is classed negatively without thinking the act is actually could be treated as normal. This makes the offender suffer as a victim as his moral element of the act is eliminated. This is due to the labelling of the authority as only law is seen but moral values and the genuine factor in committing the act.

The effect of labelling is at times unpredictable as in cases of arrest in domestic violence. (Sherman) where employed persons avoid the act further but those of unemployed found to act in more violent due to arrest which has made them being labelled.

It does not withstand an empirical testing. It could convey social and sometimes of political message. The social reaction leads to the difficulty in testing the level of criminality. It is already a problem even before the label is official. Results are ambiguous in the attempts of testing.

Labelling is actually a system of capitalism. It ignores the impact and political importance where it is against radical criminology.

As this while the labelling perspective is seen in negative manner, so John Braithwaite has brought about the positive application using the theory above which is called reintegrative shaming. Positive impacts are to be created using this. The main idea of this is to make the labelled person realise of their mistake and effects that it has created. At the same time, it is

for the society to forgive the offenders mistake and accept them back into the society.

The idea is done in a process of two ways, firstly the offender need to be confronted in front victim. Secondly, the process is done in front of the offenders family or those considered important in his life as they are to make him to be accepted in the society.

These ideas of Braithwaite claimed be able to give positive impacts as actually the real idea behind any reparation and caution plus is for the offenders to admit the guilt and ask for forgiveness from the victim. this is an excellent idea for the intention above as it has been vastly used in New Zealand Morris, Australia-Strang , Forsythe, and some parts of America-Alford. This had also been used widely in Britain with Crime and Disorder Act 1998 had been widely used as part of reparation Maxwell and Morris, Dignan, Young and Goold.

Reintergrative shaming is actually an early cautioning for the offenders as of like in situations of warning, reprimand, take decision of bail decisions, before reports are prepared, part of sentencing, decision as to release and post-release intervention. this is actually a great way to reduce white collar crimes and corporate violations of law (Simpsons). With this some could escape from being convicted even at the early stage. Labelling does create a turning point for the offenders from committing further crimes and mistakes.

Labelling theory has been a guideline for many to stay away from crimes and criminal actions. The process of avoiding the interactions with the labels

would make the law-abiding society prevented from acting out the  
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criminality. (Vold and Bernard). Especially for those who are young and new offenders.

Police could handle the offenders off the criminal justice system as labelling is easily done through society. The official cautioning does not make out of official control but it gives him a second chance to come out of the stigmatisation. So community service and probation are introduced. This allows them to be away from incarceration and reduce the stigma and labelling.

However, there had been complains that this are not effective as the rate of people being incarcerated have not reduced. So those who are being punished now are those who had been labelled earlier. It shows the labelling had not brought any good impact as said.

Conclusion, it is not because of the way society views had increase the criminality and bad behaviour but the focus of media and officials which had turn into it. Though the action taken was not harsh but the reaction given to it had made the offenders internalise the labelled self image. Its concluded that the labelling perspective is to create awareness of the existence of this criminality and not for the benefit of individual. So in acting out the task, it does bring more negative impact rather than positive to the individual.