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A Critique of the Labeling Approach: toward a Social Theory of Deviance

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A CRITIQUE OF THE LABELING APPROACH:

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by

Robert Glen Mattson-Croninger

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APPROVAL SHEET

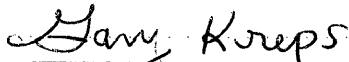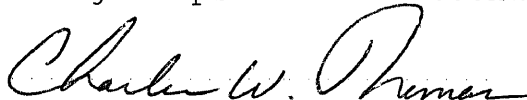This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

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ABSTRACT

This is an essay on the labeling literature, some reflections, some critical comments, some tenative ideas. The essay is an unfamiliar form for a sociological thesis. A reader demands to know one's hypothesis, or at least theoretical position where no empirical evidence is available. But labeling has been plagued by hypotheses and theoretical stances, so much so that some of its insights into deviance have been obscured. It needs a fresh interpretation, one that highlights the social issues it seeks to explain, and a fresh assessment in light of those issues. That is the goal of this essay.

What follows presents an inventory of labeling's ideas, a critical assessment of their conceptual and empirical usefulness and a methodological strategy for understanding the central issues described by labeling. In particular, the essay concentrates on labeling's assertion that social meanings and social reactions are important components of an understanding of deviance in modern societies. Although labeling's treatment of these components is found wanting, the components themselves are still seen as essential to sociological and criminological inquiry.

An ideal type framework is developed, using Weber as an authority. Four types are distinguished: respectable, involuntary, aberrant and dissident deviance. Each is suggested as having distinct social meanings; and each meaning is suggested as having a distinct influence on the likelihood that labeling or deterrence will result from official sanctioning. A brief application of this methodological strategy to juvenile delinquency suggests its heuristic validity.

A CRITIQUE OF THE LABELING APPROACH:

TOWARD A SOCIAL THEORY OF DEVIANCE

INTRODUCTION

This essay is about the labeling approach and its under-
standing of deviance in modern society. It is not, for a
number of reasons, a particularly timely topic. For one
thing, judging by the opinions recently expressed in journals
and professional meetings, a considerable number of social
scientists are ready to discard the approach as either hope-
lessly ambiguous or simply exhausted (see Gibbs, 1972;
Manning, 1973; 1975). Moreover, recent assessments of the
approach are directed toward uncovering its "latent conserva-
tive biases" (see Gouldner, 1968; Liazos, 1972; Davis, 1972;
Schervish, 1973; Thio, 1973), an event in current sociology
that usually sounds the death toll-- recall the criticisms
of Parsons's system's theory. In brief, the popular validity
that sustained labeling during the seven years following
Becker's (1963) <u>Outsiders</u> has been replaced by an equally
popular scepticism.

Of course, one can always go against the tide, support
labeling against the current conventional wisdom. But even
the approach's original theorists are raising damaging cri-
ticisms about labeling's empirical and conceptual status. In
the second edition to a collection of originally formative
essays on labeling, Lemert (1972: 16) describes the approach's

development in a single terse paragraph.

> What began as some tenative and loosely linked ideas
> about deviance and societal reactions in my writings
> subsequently were replaced by the theoretical state-
> ments of Becker that social groups create deviance and
> that deviant behavior is that which is so labeled. This
> position got further elucidation in Erikson's function-
> alist derived position that the social audience is the
> critical factor in deviance study. In retrospect these
> must be regarded as conceptual extrusions largely re-
> sponsible for the indiscriminating application of label-
> ing theory to a diversity of research and writing on
> deviance. Unfortunately, the impression of crude socio-
> logical determinism left by the Becker and Erikson state-
> ments has been amplified by the tendency of many deviance
> studies to be preoccupied with the work of official agents
> of social control, accenting the arbitrariness of official
> action, stereotyped decision-making in bureaucratic con-
> texts, bias in the administration of law, and the general
> preemptive nature of society's control over deviants.

Although Lemert urges the "proper" development of labeling,

Manning (1973) suggests that this essay signifies the

approach's inevitable atrophy, bringing to an end the concep-

tual period initiated by labeling theorists. Lemert (1974)

himself justifies the argument, for several years later in a

presidential address to the Society for the Study of Social

Problems he urges theorists to abandon earlier claims and to

go beyond Mead's interactionist framework.

Why then write about the labeling approach? For one

thing, present criticism crudely reject the entire approach,

and although labeling possesses a number of misleading claims,

many of which will be presented in a later part of this essay,

it also possesses some insightful and frequently neglected

directions for deviancy studies. Unlike the normative perspec-

tive, in which research focuses on the personal and social

characteristics of deviants, the labeling approach draws

attention to the interaction between those who commit deviant acts and those in a position to pass moral judgments upon those actors. Accordingly, research and theory-building over the past ten years has been directed toward a number of important questions about deviance and social reactions: When is a deviant act likely to be severely sanctioned? When is a deviant act likely to stimulate little or no reaction? Whose rules are enforced by legitimate social reactions? Under what conditions are these rules enforced? Who applies the deviant label to whom? What consequences does the application of a deviant label have for a person? These are significant questions that are neglected by normative theorists, and they are questions that are obscured by a hasty rejection of labeling's central focus.

Furthermore, an overly simplified rejection of labeling obscures the re-emphasis the approach places on classical concerns about the social meanings of deviance in modern society. Although normative theorists ostensibly note the modern context in which deviance occurs (there is always some mention of normative plurality), they do not direct research or theory toward understanding this context. Rather normative studies concentrate on the legitimate but narrow issue of what causes people to commit deviant acts; they do not attempt to understand the relationships between deviance, ascribed social meanings and the social order of modern society. It was, ironically, Durkheim who concerned himself and his writings with these relationships. In the Division of Labor (1964a),

Durkheim described the precariousness of solidarity in modern society, and he briefly elaborated the role deviance plays both in upsetting and reinforcing that solidarity. His later works, especially <u>Suicide</u> (1952) and <u>Rules of Sociological Method</u> (1964b), further explored some of the roles deviance plays in modern society, such as providing a focus for group identification or as heralding a new collective conscience. Like labeling theorists (see Erikson, 1966; Douglas, 1970a), Durkheim conceived of the study of deviance as the study of the affirmation and construction of moral meanings in every-day life. It is this concern with the broader social meanings of deviance, especially as they are designated by social reactions, that is lost by a total rejection of the approach.

Labeling also, at least potentially, converges with several current orientations in sociology and criminology. For one, the conflict approach, represented by such theorists as Sellin (1938), Vold (1958), Turk (1966) and Quinney (1970), describe modern society as involving moral disagreement. Sellin (1938: 29) makes this point in a passage that adumbrates labeling's description of the modern world.

> The more complex a culture becomes, the more likely it
> is that a number of normative groups which affect a
> person will be large, and the greater the chance that
> the norms of these groups will fail to agree, no matter
> how much they overlap as a result of common acceptance.

Another complementary approach centers around the studies on "respectable" deviance. In an article on white-collar crime, Sutherland (1940) argues that rarely is deviant behavior committed by people of high status in the course of their

occupation recorded in police statistics. Although these
deviants cost men and women considerably more than convention-
al criminals (Sutherland and Cressey, 1974; Pearce, 1973),
they rarely face the same amount of social reaction that is
directed toward lower status criminals. Both Sutherland and
Sellin suggest, like the labeling theorists, that deviance in
modern society is intricately associated with social defini-
tions and the power of some to have their definitions strictly
enforced. By emphasizing the importance of reactions in ex-
plaining deviant behavior, labeling suggests some social
relationships that would more fully integrate the studies on
conflict and respectable crime.

All of this, the research questions, the classical
issues, the convergence with studies on conflict and respec-
table deviance, is not presented as evidence of labeling's
extraordinary explanatory powers. As many have argued, the
approach <u>is</u> excessively loose, conceptually inconsistent,
difficult to empirically verify and prone toward vulgariza-
tion and politicalization. But confusion, as Emerson once
said, need not be indication of defective intelligence: it
may, at times, be simply an honest mind working on an
inherently difficult and complex problem. Undoubtedly, some
of labeling's difficulties indicate just this honest reflec-
tion on an inherently complex problem-- the social meanings of
deviance in modern society. By concentrating simply on the
approach's conceptual and empirical confusion, the critics
obscure the complexity of the social issues it seeks to

understand. The task of criticism, therefore, is to assess labeling according to these issues, according to the conceptual problems it seeks to unravel, and where it is found wanting, suggest alternative strategies for research and theory. This is the task of this thesis.

There are, however, a number of issues and problems associated with labeling, and their conceptual complexity prevents a thorough assessment of the approach, at least within the scope of this paper. As a result, this paper will concentrate primarily on those aspects of labeling that seek to understand what is socially made of an act, what that definition suggests about social reactions and what consequences those reactions are likely to have for a deviant. The pages that follow will describe the basic ideas of labeling and assess its utility as an explanatory framework. From this assessment, especially as it applies to the social meanings of deviance, a different strategy for understanding deviance in modern society will be presented, one that will hardly solve all the problems revolving around the approach, but one that will make some of them more understandable.

CHAPTER I

INVENTORY OF IDEAS

Although the labeling perspective has dominated the literature for twelve years, there is an embarrassing amount of disagreement about exactly what is labeling's approach to deviant behavior. Critics seem more confused than anyone. Rock (1974), for instance, claims that labeling is too phenomenological, enmeshing it in reductionism, yet Douglas (1970a) laments labeling's lack of phenomenological focus. Similarly, Lemert (1974) calls for labeling theorists to go beyond Mead's interactionist perspective, while others (see Rogers and Buffalo, 1974; Schervish, 1973) criticize the literature for ignoring Mead's central insights. At times, the confusion results from the misguided efforts of critics and proponents alike to attribute labeling to some classical perspective-- so that the criticism might seem more coherent or the defense more convincing. At other times, however, the confusion reflects a real looseness in the approach itself (Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973), which leads to a pertinent question-- in what way can any set of assumptions and ideas assume to be the labeling approach to deviant behavior?

The word labeling hardly captures the subtle differences between such theorists as Becker (1963) and Lemert (1951; 1967),

Erikson (1966) and Matza (1969) or Kitsuse (1964) and

Scheff (1966). Still, there is a sense in which a core, a

trunk, can be identified amidst these subtle branches of

labeling, and this, using Gibbs's (1966) term, is labeling's

"conception" of deviant behavior. Whereas previous theories

conceive of deviance as the infraction of some agreed-upon

rule, portraying deviants as sharing some social or personal

attribute by which the infraction can be explained, labeling

conceives of deviance as the product of social interaction,

logically seperating the act and the judgments people make

about them (Becker, 1971). The following passage by Becker

(1963: 9), perhaps the most quoted description of labeling's

position, points this out.

> Deviance...is created by society. I do not mean this
> in the way it is ordinarily understood, in which causes
> of deviancies are located in the social situation of
> the deviant or in the "social factors" which prompt his
> action. I mean, rather, social groups create deviance
> by making the rules whose infraction constitutes
> deviance, and by applying those rules to particular
> people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point
> of view, deviance is not a quality of the act a person
> commits, but rather a consequence of the application by
> others of rules and sanctions to an "offender." The
> deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully
> applied; deviant behavior is behavior people so label.

Some people who act oddly are committed to mental hospitals,

some are not; some people who break the laws are arrested and

sent to prison, some are not; some people who drink too much

are labeled "alcoholics," some are not-- the differences be-

tween those who are labeled deviant and those who are not

depends on what others make of the act, what social judgments

are made and what responses those judgments provoke from actor

and audience alike. According to labeling theorists, deviance is not simply a violation of some agreed-upon rule; rather deviance is the outcome of processes of social definition and social reaction.

In other words, Becker argues that the labels people apply to behavior are logically independent of any act in itself. In one sense, such a statement is blatantly true. Since Durkheim, at least, sociologists and criminologists have recognized that designations such as "normal" and "abnormal," "conforming" and "deviant" are socially specific, specific to history, cultures and subcultures. Only the most unregenerate biological determinist or structural-functionalist would quibble with labeling's contention that deviance resides in social definitions and reactions, rather than in the acts or persons committing them (Akers, 1968). But Becker, as well as other labeling proponents, is making a bolder claim: the acts people commit and the labels people attach to them are seperate, not simply in the abstract but in specific situations as well. In this sense, there are no neat categories of deviance or crime, only categories of people who have been isolated and distinguished from others by the social definitions and reactions applied to them (Kitsuse and Cicourel, 1963).

As Erikson (1966) argues, by defining deviance this way, the labeling approach highlights certain aspects of deviance that had been frequently taken for granted in earlier conceptions. For instance, Merton's (1975) theory of anomie, still a central framework for deviance research, is designed

to account for behavior that strays from community norms, regardless of whose standards those norms represent. Consequently, the banker who sifts through the day's loan requests making decisions according to race and the armed robber who takes from him the day's receipts are both deviants, since both in their own way violate the community's norms. But the banker, regardless of the effects of his actions, even if he is largely a cause of the robbery, faces different consequences for his actions than those faced by the armed robber. The banker seldom provokes the community's ire, while the armed robber sets in motion the community's entire social control mechanism. Although the labeling analysts sometimes express interest in "secret" deviants or self-typing, all agree that those rule-breakers who are singled out by the police, mental health personnel, the courts or other official audiences face adjustment problems concerning "spoiled identity" that hidden deviants do not. An aim of labeling's conception, then, is to focus attention on the consequences of being labeled an outsider, especially when the labeling is done by official control agents.

Preeminently, the labeling approach involves an interactional process in which relative social judgments are the primary determinant of deviance. This conception of deviance has led to several related yet distinguishable lines of questioning. The first, and the least elaborated by labeling theorists, asks questions about the social order. Whose rules are enforced? Whose reactions are likely to be

compelling? The second asks questions about the applica-

tion of labels. Who is more likely to be labeled a deviant?

What influence do official stereotypes and interests have on

enforcement policy? Finally, the third line of questioning

simply asks what are the consequences of being labeled a

deviant? The following paragraphs present some of the answers

labeling theorsists have provided to these questions, answers

that have become known as labeling's approach to deviant

behavior.

Rules, Reactions and the Social Order

Whose reactions, whose social judgments are likely to

be more compelling than others? When labeling theorists

defined deviance according to actual social reactions, they

pinpointed a theoretical problem, but not an answer. In other

words, what is the conceptual difference between rules that

are not enforced and reactions that are not forceful? Kitsuse

(1964), for instance, found the reactions of college students

to homosexuals to be "generally mild." Does a generally

mild reaction constitute deviance? If not, how harsh must a

reaction be before it can be described as deviance? Similarly,

one of Becker's (1963: 11) observations leads to confusion.

After his example of labeling, in which a young Trobriand

Islander is "forced" to commit suicide by the public denuncia-

tion of another native, Becker concludes: "You can commit clan

incest and suffer no more than gossip as long as no one makes

a public accusation..." Why is gossip an insignificant reaction?

Whatever the merits of labeling's position, as Gibbs (1966)

points out, it is not without difficulty, for it never says

exactly what identifies an act as deviant.

Gibbs, of course, is right, but he is right for some not

so obvious reasons. While labeling is in need of some con-

ceptual housecleaning, the difficulty rests with the very idea

of labeling or more specifically with the relationship between

social reactions and labeling. In Kitsuse's (1964) study of

student reactions toward homosexuals, negative responses,

regardless of their intensity, identified homosexuality as

deviant. What it did not do, however, is equally important:

it did not effectively differentiate the homosexuals from the

other students, the deviants from the nondeviants. This

differentiation process is what Becker (1963: 9) referred

to as successful labeling. A frequently quoted passage

by the early criminologist Tannenbaum (1938: 19-20) describes

it fairly well.

> The process of making the criminal (of successful
> labeling) therefore, is a process of tagging, defining,
> identifying, segregating, describing, emphasizing,
> making conscious and self-conscious; it becomes a way
> of stimulating, suggesting, emphasizing, and evoking
> the very traits that are complained of....The person
> becomes the thing he is described as being.

A reaction to illicit behavior can be almost anything-- from

the generally mild responses of the students in Kitsuse's

study to the more dramatic denunciation of the young Trobriand

Islander-- any of which define the behavior as deviant to

someone. In this sense, it is odd that labeling proponents

identify reaction as the crucial and forgotten element of

deviance. What is crucial, however, is the point at which

social reactions become social labeling. And it is about this

matter that labeling theorists are disturbingly silent.

In part, the difficulty rests with labeling's adherence

to Mead's interactionist framework. Insofar as labeling takes

a subjectivist stance, it must deal with each person in their

own right, facing, interpreting and dealing with the reactions

of others (see Blumer, 1969: 61-77). As Lemert (1951: 74-75)

explains it:

> The importance of the person's conscious symbolic
> reactions to his or her own behavior cannot be overstressed
> in explaining the shift from normal to abnormal behavior
> or from one type of pathological behavior to another,
> particularly where behavior variations become systematized
> or structured into pathological roles...the self-defining
> junctures are critical points of personality genesis and
> in the special case of the atypical person they mark a
> division between two different types of deviation.

The two types, of course, are primary and secondary deviance,

a distinction that will be taken up later. For the moment,

however, it is important to understand that this emphasis

upon "conscious symbolic reactions" constructs an inescapable

tautology for the labeling theorists. Any social reaction

is potentially one that will effectively label a person and

their behavior, since effectiveness depends upon the deviants

own symbolic reaction. Effective labels and reactions, accord-

ing to this scheme, are simply those that are effective. This

accounts for the tendency of observational studies, such as

Scott's (1969) analysis of the "blindness system" or Ray's

(1964) portrayal of relapse among heroin addicts, to provide

evidence of labeling by inferring the impact of social responses

through the deviant's own perceptions of stigma.

Nevertheless, labeling theorists, at least implicitly, suggest that official reactions-- that is, the reactions by police, judges and other formal control agents-- are likely to result in labeling. Such determinism is in some respects opposed to Mead's subjectivism, and it is hard not to admire the ingenuity with which labeling analysts appear to anchor it in a subjectivist framework. Building on some traditional ideas of symbolic interactionism (see Hughes, 1945; Garfinkel, 1956), labeling theorists describe public reactions as essentially "degradation ceremonies." In a criminal trial, a prototypical degradation ceremony, a person's personality is erased and replaced with a cultural label-- a "rapist" or a "thief." Schwartz and Skonlick (1964) document this effect in a quite limited yet frequently quoted study of legal stigma. After confronting twenty-five employers with four types of personnel folders, each containing a different degree of legal stigma (no record, acquitted, acquitted with a letter of reassurance from the judge and convicted as charged), Schwartz and Skolnick found the folders with the most stigma (convicted and acquitted without a letter) to fair poorly in the job market. One employer expressed interest in a convicted folder; three expressed interest in the acquitted without a letter folder. The other two folders were more marketable. Nine employers expressed interest in the folder with no record; six employers expressed interest in the acquitted with a letter folder. Using similar studies (see Simmons, 1969; Scheff,

1966), labeling proponents document the existence of similar
public stereotypes, stereotypes that supposedly come into
play once a person is officially reacted to as a deviant.

While labeling analysts are uncertain about some reac-
tions, allowing a person's subjective response to be the
final word on importance, public reactions are uniformly
seen as overwhelming, regardless of the deviant's symbolic
interpretation. Mead (1918: 590) himself, in a classic
essay on the psychology of punitive justice, referred to
legal stigmas as the modernization of taboos.

> I refer to that accompanying stigma place upon the
> criminal. The revulsions against criminality reveal
> themselves in a sense of solidarity with the group, a
> sense of being a citizen which on the one hand excludes
> those who have transgressed the laws of the group and
> on the other inhibits tendencies to criminal acts in the
> citizen himself. It is this emotional reaction against
> conduct which excludes from society that gives to the
> moral taboos of the group such impressiveness.

It is this moral taboo that labeling refers to when it speaks
of stereotypes, of the deviant's difficulty in "shaking off"
public labels and of the compelling nature of being officially
declared a deviant-- recall Becker's example of the young
Trobriand Islander. Although labeling theorists never
adequately explain why there should be so much agreement about
the "disdainful" qualities of rule-breakers and so much dis-
agreement about the rules themselves (see Becker, 1963: 15-18;
Lemert, 1972: 26-61), they still assert that official reactions
attribute a "master status" to a person's misconduct, a status
that changes interaction patterns and effectively alters, in
time, a violator's perceptions of himself. Official reactions,

then, are reactions that label.

This concern with official reactions has led some label-
ing analysts to explore the creation of formal rules-- that
is, rules that are enforced by some official group of people.
Again, labeling theorists, like many conflict analysts
(see Turk, 1966; Quinney, 1970), argue that modern society
is characterized by conflicts over values and expectations.
What is right for one person often proves deviant for another.
In addition to laws revolving around life, property and per-
son, modern society generates a vast amount of "regulatory
laws," laws dealing with health, public safety, welfare,
business practises and transportation. In each of these
cases, the moral meanings, particularly the moral obligation
to obey, depends largely on a person's relationship to the
group whose interests and values are represented by the rules
(Lemert, 1972). The content of laws, and correspondingly the
rules potentially enforceable by control agents, depends on
the ability of certain groups to have their values and in-
terests cast into legal forms. In this sense, labeling ana-
lysts rightfully stress that one of the most important deter-
minants of a rule, of its content and who it potentially de-
fines as deviant, is the absence of certain groups in the col-
lective interaction that generates laws. To a degree, label-
ing theorists portray social conflict much as Dahrendorf
(1959: 179-193) does, in which organized groups generate sup-
port for their values from less conscious groups. The main
medium for this process, at least for labeling theorists, is

the mass media.

To illustrate, Becker (1963: 135-146), who has done some of the conceptual work in this area, describes what he calls moral enterprising as an endeavor to construct part of society's moral fabric. As an example, he interprets the passage of the Marijuana Tax Act in 1937 by the United States Congress. Principally through the efforts of the Bureau of Narcotics, then under the Treasury Department, public concern about the "dangerous" use of marijuana was generated by a public information campaign. Although the Treasury Department itself minimized the problem of marijuana in its 1931 yearly report, the Bureau generated enough support to have a draft of the bill presented before the House Ways and Means Committee in 1937. After some minor revisions to safeguard the legitimate interests of business, the bill was passed in both the House and Senate. Becker (1963: 145) sums up the bill's passage as follows: "Marijuana smokers, powerless, unorganized, and lacking legitimate grounds for attack, sent no representatives to the hearings and their point of view found no place in the record...The eneterprise of the Bureau produced a new rule, whose subsequent enforcement would help create a new class of outsiders-- marijuana smokers."

Similar processes are described in Platt's (1969) explanation of delinquency laws, Gusfield's (1968) interpretation of the enactment of the Prohibition Amendment, and Duster's (1970) analysis of anti-drug legislations. What is important in these studies is that interests are described as sometimes

more symbolic than material in nature. As Gusfield argues,
the Prohibition Amendment is a classic example, for it was
largely a middle-class, rural, Protestant movement aimed at
controlling the values of lower-class, urban, Catholic
immigrants. In this light, the making of rules, especially
in the instance of moral crusades, is a symbolic act, symbol-
izing the importance or superiority of a group's way of life.
Both Duster and Platt make similar arguments. In this sense,
labeling analysts perceive the legal definition of deviance,
especially with regard to crimes without victims, as the ef-
forts of middle- and upper-class Americans to formalize their
values and control behavior they see as deviant. And, of
course, from a labeling point of view, rule-making is an im-
portant example of how social control causes deviance.

In another sense, however, the significance of moral
crusades rests not in their origins, but in their outcomes:
in the legitimation of a police force. In other words, while
it is up to rule-makers to create categories of deviance, it
is up to another type of moral entrepeneur, rule-enforcers,
to apply the laws and create a class of outsiders (Becker,
1963). Offenders must be discovered, apprehended and convict-
ed, and this job falls to professional enforcers who have
interests and values of their own. Accordingly, labeling theo-
rists end up back at the source of labeling, at the applica-
tion of rules by police, judges and other officials (for a
critique of this circle see Gouldner, 1968; Thio, 1973). In
the labeling approach, the way in which officials enforce

rules, the manner in which they recruit people as outsiders,
largely determines who is and who is not deviant.

Enforcement and the Application of Labels

Schur (1971: 82-99) refers to the study of "deviance
processing" organizations as central to the understanding of
the ways in which social control shapes and even, in a sense,
causes deviant behavior. From what has been said, he is quite
right, at least insofar as labeling is concerned. Rules are
not uniformly enforced. Some rules are enforced only when
they result in certain consequences. The unmarried mother
presents a clear example. While school officials are unlikely
to approve of promiscuity, they seldom do anything until a
girl becomes pregnant-- then she is expelled. Some rules are
applied more to certain people than others. Again, while the
unwed mother is often forced to leave school, the boy, who is
also responsible, is seldom treated in the same fashion.
Some rules, furthermore, are variously enforced over time.
The occurrence of "drives" against certain kinds of deviance,
like gambling or homosexuality, for instance, indicates this
clearly. These things taken together suggest the differential
manner in which rules are enforced. And the manner in which ✓
officials go about enforcing rules, apprehending people,
processing deviants, "treating" them and so on, identifies
those people who are to become known as outsiders.

For the most part, labeling's contentions are supported
by the literature on complex organizations. Research in this

area has repeatedly documented the existence of informal

rules which emerge within the formal structures of organiza-

tions. In one classic of the field, Gouldner's (1954)

Patterns of Bureaucracy, the consequences of enforcing inac-

tive formal rules, as well as the practicality of their en-

forcement, are described for a company that mined gypsum rock

near one of the Great Lakes. According to Gouldner, the

plant moved at an informal pace for many years. Many of the

employees used plant materials, and for the most part it was

a pleasant day's labor, despite complaints from company

headquarters about low production and excessive waste. After

the old manager died though, things changed; headquarters

sent in a new manager with orders to tighten up. Before long

miners were being fired for doing things that were previously

considered legitimate. While the new manager successfully

reinstated the formal rules with regard to surface operations,

his efforts to bureaucratize the more dangerous mining opera-

tions failed. In the mines unpredictability was high and

cooperation was crucial. Gouldner's study, like the better

labeling research, demonstrates the importance of organiza-

tional form and social situations in determining what rules

will be enforced and who will be labeled deviant.

This informal side of enforcement and its relation to

social situaions has been brought out in several studies con-

ducted from a labeling orientation. Bittner (1967a), for in-

stance, shows how the rules of policeman and peace officer

are sometimes exchanged by patrolmen on Skid Row. According

to Bittner, patrolmen on Skid Row keep the peace by culti-
vating personal relationships with residents, holding little
regard for culpability, and making decisions geared more
toward solving situational problems than the formal rules.
At least on Skid Row, rules are applied differentially in
order to manage residential tension. Similarly, Sundow
(1965) observes the importance of informal arrangements be-
tween the Public Defender's Office and the Prosecutor's
Office. Often arrangements go beyond simple plea-bargaining,
reflecting what the public defender and prosecutor consider
to be a "normal" crime. In this sense, the categorization of
an act determines what portions of the legal code a deviant
will be charged with and thus the possibilities for
plea-bargaining. In both of these cases, as with Gouldner's
study, informal rules emerge between the demands of situation-
al tensions and organizational interests.

Unfortunately, Bittner's and Sundow's studies are excep-
tions. Labeling research tends to underplay the importance
of organizational interests and tensions in generating in-
formal rules. Instead, research concentrates on documenting
selectiveness in applying labels, principally through the in-
fluence of informal stereotypes. Deviants, Rubington and
Weinberg (1968: 5) argue, are "persons who are typed socially
in a very special sort of way. They are assigned to categor-
ies and each category carries with it a stock interpretive
accounting of any persons contained under the rubric." Label-
ing focuses on the content of these stereotypes in order

to describe what kinds of people are more likely to be defined as deviant. An excellent example of this can be found in Piliavin's and Briar's (1964: 210) observations on police encounters with juveniles, in which they stress the "cues" officers use to distinguish delinquents from nondelinquents.

> ...both the decision made in the field-- whether or not
> to bring the boy in-- and the decision made at the sta-
> tion-- which disposition to invoke-- were based largely
> on the cues which emerged from the interaction between
> officer and the youth, cues from which the officer in-
> ferred the youth's character. These cues included the
> youth's group affiliations, age, race, grooming, dress,
> and demeanor. Older juveniles, members of known delin-
> quent gangs, Negroes, youths with well-oiled hair, black
> jackets, and soiled denims or jeans (the presumed uni-
> form of 'tough boys'), and boys who in their interac-
> tions with officers did not manifest what were consider-
> ed to be appropriate signs of respect tended to receive
> the more severe dispositions.

The manner in which control agents sift through a person's behavior, screening out certain acts as unimportant, empha- sizing still others as indicating a person's "real" self, largely determines the intensity of sanctions and the effec- tiveness of labeling.

The processing of juvenile delinquents is a major arena for this type of research. Ironically, juvenile courts, which were established in the early nineteen-hundreds to curb the stigmatization of troublesome children (Platt, 1969), are particularly vulnerable to labeling processes. Juveniles can come under the court's jurisdiction for a variety of mis- conducts, from "incorrigibility" to major criminal offenses, and once under the court's jurisdiction they are subjected to a number of "child savers," each using slightly different

informal standards to determine how best to deter any further
delinquency. The discretion invested in many officials of
the juvenile system, from the policeman to the judge to the
probation official, makes stereotypic responses quite likely.
Cicourel (1968), for example, argues that "appealing and
attractive" delinquents "who want very much to be helped" are
more likely to have their behavior interpreted clinically or
socially than criminally. Outside of demeanor, the labeling
orientation suggests that ethnicity, socioeconomic status,
education, age, sex, type of offense and previous record all
influence whether a delinquent will enter the juvenile sys-
tem, and once in it, how he will be treated (see Thomas and
Sieverdes, 1975; Thomas and Cage, 1975; Thornberry, 1973).

Not all labeling research on the application of labels,
however, has been done on the juvenile system. Some people
have concerned themselves with more subtle forms of stereo-
typing, especially those forms emerging from professional
values or treatment standards. For the most part, this type
of research is done on the mental health system or altruistic
organizations for the handicapped, in which "experts" are
required to define the degree of deviantness. Scott (1970;
1969), for instance, in researching the "blindness system,"
explains that the general definition of blindness is quite
arbitrary, and that many people classified as blind actually
have some measurable vision. Consequently, contact with an
opthamalogist or welfare agent frequently determines whether
a person is treated as someone having difficulty in seeing or

as a blind person with residual sight. Similarly, Scheff

(1966) notes that psychiatric and judicial hearings on mental

incompetency are largely perfunctory, since these officials

consider it more dangerous to "judge a sick person well than

to judge a well person sick." In one of Scheff's studies,

although sixty-three percent of the patients did not meet

legal requirements for involuntary status (they were neither

severely impaired nor dangerous), virtually every hearing

recommended commitment. In a final example, Rosehan (1973)

conducted a study in which eight people gained entrance into

different mental hospitals by imitating several psychotic

symptoms during an admission interview. Immediately on

entrance, they stopped simulating any abnormal symptoms.

In all twelve cases the pseudo-patients had difficulty in

establishing their sanity to the different hospitals's

personnel. After an average hospitalization of nineteen

days, each was released with the diagnosis "schizophrenia in

remission." In all three examples, the expectations and

standards of "experts," regardless of their good intentions,

played a crucial part in determining who was deviant and

who was not.

To their credit, labeling analysts focus attention on

the processes by which deviants are differentiated from

nondeviants. Although they underplay some important matters,

such as organizational interests, stress and pressures, they

highlight the workings of informal stereotypes, especially

as they operate in the juvenile and other therapeutic systems.

Such stereotypes influence who is likely to be accused,

apprehended and treated as deviant, and the likelihood of

being identified as deviant determines the likelihood of

being successfully labeled as an outsider.

Consequences of Labeling: Becoming a Deviant

> It is one thing to commit a deviant act-- eg. acts of
> lying, stealing, homosexual intercourse, narcotics'
> use, drinking to excess, unfair competition. It is quite
> another thing to be charged and invested with a deviant
> character, ie. to be socially defined as a liar, a thief,
> a homosexual, a dope fiend, a drunk, a chiseler, a
> brown-noser, a hoodlum, a sneak, a scab and so on. It
> is to be assigned a role, a special type of category of
> persons. The label-- the name of the role-- does more
> than signify one who has committed such-and-such a
> deviant act. Each label evokes a characteristic imagery.
> It suggests someone who is normally or habitually given
> to certain kinds of deviance; who is literally a bundle
> of odious and sinister qualities. It activates senti-
> ments and calls out responses in others: rejection,
> contempt, suspicion, withdrawal, fear, hatred.

This passage by Cohen (1966: 24) accurately portrays the

crucial distinction between committing a deviant act and

being invested with a deviant character, which is the basis

of labeling analysis. The first involves the processes

culminating in an act; the second invloves the processes by

which accused deviants are socially differentiated from others.

In a series of important essays on the labeling position,

Lemert (1967; 1972) proposes the significance of this distinc-

tion by pointing out the insufficiency of Merton's structural

approach to deviance, in particular his theory of anomie.

Deviance, Lemert argues, suggests two types of research ques-

tions: (1) how deviant behavior originates and (2) how deviant

acts are effectively attached to persons, influencing further

deviance by that person. The first, and the focus of Merton's approach, arises from a variety of sources for a variety of reasons. No single theory, then, whether it proposes "strain," "differential opportunity" or some similar explanation, can possibly capture the act's etiological complexity. The second, however, at least for Lemert (1951: 75), is the more understandable and sociologically significant, for "deviations are not significant until they are organized subjectively and transformed into active social roles and become the social criteria for assigning status." Lemert, as well as other labeling analysts, suggest that consistent deviant behavior results from social labeling, from the processes culminating in commitment to a deviant role.

In this way, Lemert distinguishes between primary and secondary deviance. Primary deviance, the deviance that Merton focuses attention on, arises for a number of social, cultural, psychological and biological reasons, and at best it has only minimal effect on a person's self-concept. People become alcoholics for a variety of resasons, from the death of a loved one or business failure, from an intolerance to alcohol or even from participating in some cultural role that requires a great deal of drinking. Similar arguments are made by Scheff (1966) in his description of residual rule breaking and by Becker (1963: 26) in his statement that "most people experience deviant impulses frequently." Secondary deviance, however, is the organization of deviant behavior into a social role, which becomes a means of "defense,

attack or adaptation" (Lemert, 1967) to the problems created

by the social reactions directed toward a person's primary

deviance. What is explicitly important for Lemert (1967: 17)

in this distinction is that it implies not only a shift in

behavioral patterns but a shift in the "causes" of deviance

as well: "the original causes of deviation recede and give

way to the central importance of the disapproving, degrada-

tional and labeling reactions of society." In other words,

while the origins of initial deviance are diverse, repeated

deviance or secondary deviance is caused by a commitment to

a miscreant role, which in turn is caused by official labels.

When taken to extremes, this assertion leads to inevi-

table problems for labeling analysts. While the contention

implies labeling's explanatory superiority over Merton's

structural focus, it also runs against an interactionist

position. Becker (1960: 36) himself, in an earlier essay

about components of commitment, argues that initial behavior

as well as initial interests are important to consider.

> Whenever we propose commitment as an explanation of con-
> sistency in behavior, we must have independent observa-
> tions of the major components in such a proposition:
> (1) prior actions of the person staking some originally
> extraneous interest in his following a consistent line
> of activity; (2) a recognition by him of the involvement
> of this originally extraneous interest in his present
> activity; and (3) the resulting consistent line of
> activity.

Essentially, labeling proponents fall into the same trap that

Cohen (1965) recognizes in structural approaches to deviance:

they assume discontinuity. In other words, what difference

is there between anomie theory-- deviance portrayed as an

abrupt change, as a leap from strain to abnormal behavior--
and the labeling approach, in which the original causes of
deviance disappear, abruptly giving way to secondary deviance
with the onslaught of social reactions? Some of the problem,
of course, could be handled by labeling proponents if they
conceptualized the importance of original motivations, inter-
ests and structure in their studies, yet, for the most part,
they define away these aspects with the concept of primary
deviance.

Despite this conceptual problem, labeling analysts right-
fully argue the possibility that social reactions push people
into deviant roles. A study by Jewell (1962) indicates that
secondary deviance does occur, although not without some im-
portant influences prior to labeling. "Bill," as Jewell
refers to his subject, was a Navajo Indian, who was hospital-
ized and diagnosed as schizophrenic without having the usual
psychiatric workup. At the initial interview Bill was ques-
tioned in Spanish, since he was mistaken for a Mexican.
Bill's failure to respond, however, was interpreted as evidence
of pathology rather than as a language barrier. Consequently,
he was diagnosed schizophrenic. Much of Bill's behavior,
Jewell argues, was consistent with traditional Navajo responses
to stressful situations. Even the grotesque posture Bill dis-
played, the waxy flexibility of catatonic schizophrenia,
reflected the Navajo's traditional deference to the white man
rather than any form of pathology. When interviewed by Jewell,
Bill explained his posture as complying to what he thought was

expected of him. In short, Jewell argues that Bill was confused by the hospital setting, that he retreated to the traditional Navajo passivity in the face of threats and that his responses won him a place in one of the hospital's back wards.

A more pure case of secondary deviance is presented by Lemert (1951; 1967; 1972) in his study of adult stuttering. Although there has been much research into the possible physiological and biological causes of stuttering, no satisfactory explanation has been found, which Lemert argues points to the possibility that stuttering is socially caused. Accordingly, Lemert argues that early reactions to children's speech, either by family or peers or even speech therapists, determine whether stuttering persists into later life. In the case of speech therapists, children are often required to talk in front of mirrors or in front of other children in order to demonstrate the abnormal movements of a stutterer's mouth. Despite the therapist's benign intentions, Lemert (1951: 159) argues, these efforts result in instilling "an unequivocal self-definition as one who is different from others." In time, Lemert concludes, the stutterer adopts more fully this self-definition in order to solve identity problems posed by interaction, thus entering into secondary deviance.

This process of becoming a deviant is represented and more fully elaborated by figure 1. People engage in primary deviance for a number of reasons. If no one reacts negatively

to the infractions, they would have little or no effect on

people's perceptions of themselves. If one of these people,

for one reason or another, is singled out, reacted to nega-

tively, then he is faced with a new situation. If the reac-

tion is intense, especially if it is the reaction of some

Figure 1: Becoming a Secondary Deviant

```
┌─────────────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────────────┐
│  PRIMARY DEVIANCE:      │          │  SOCIAL REACTION:       │
│   Arising from a        │          │   Especially when in    │
│   variety of things,    │          │   the form of public    │
│   of only temporary     │──────▶   │   reaction, creates     │
│   and insignificant     │          │   deviant expectations  │
│   importance to a       │          │   for interactional     │
│   person's actual       │          │   processes.            │
│   self-councept         │          │                         │
└─────────────────────────┘          └─────────────────────────┘
                                                  │
                           ◀                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐          ┌─────────────────────────┐
│  SECONDARY DEVIANCE:    │          │  ROLE ENGULFMENT:       │
│   If the deviant is     │          │   Deviant act is the    │
│   unsuccessful, he      │          │   most sanguine aspect  │
│   enters secondary      │   ◀──────│   in interaction with   │
│   deviance, adopting    │          │   others, deviant       │
│   the role as a means   │          │   attempts to reduce    │
│   of solving inter-     │          │   its importance by     │
│   actional problems.    │          │   various methods.      │
└─────────────────────────┘          └─────────────────────────┘
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public official, the person is likely to become engulfed by

stereotypic expectations. Keying on some of Becker's and

Lemert's ideas, Schur (1971) describes role engulfment as

the tendency for deviants to become "caught up" in deviant

expectations, to find that the initial infraction has become

a highly salient aspect of how others interact with them.
If the deviant can neutralize the reactions, either by seek-
ing support from others or by rationalizing his own behavior,
he returns to a primary category (the pathway represented by
the dotted arrow). But if the deviant fails to neutralize the
reactions of others, he becomes a secondary deviant, succumb-
ing to the expectations of others in order to solve the
problems presented by role engulfment.

How much labeling, how many reactions must occur before
a primary deviant becomes a secondary deviant? When emphasiz-
ing the processual nature of their model, labeling analysts
argue that secondary deviance seldom occurs over night.
Rather the sequence of interaction involves several instances
of deviance and social reactions. Lemert (1951: 77) describes
it as follows:

> The sequence of interaction leading to secondary
> deviance is roughly as follows: (1) primary deviation;
> (2) social penalties; (3) further primary deviation;
> (4) stronger penalties and rejection; (5) further
> deviations perhaps with hostilities and resentment
> beginning to focus upon those doing the penalizing;
> (6) crisis reached in the tolerance quotient, expressed
> in formal action by the community stigmatizing the
> deviant; (7) strengthening of the deviant conduct as
> a reaction to the stigmatizing and penalties; (8)
> ultimate acceptance of deviant social status and efforts
> at adjustment on the basis of the associated role.

Still, while labeling analysts portray a variety of social
reactions leading up to secondary deviance, the crisis in
tolerance, and the entrance of formal control agents is the
crucial point in the labeling process. Once publicly✓
labeled, secondary deviance is only a matter of time.

Taken together, the previous three sections provide an inventory of labeling. The ideas concerning how rules are made, how rules are enforced and how that enforcement leads some to define themselves as secondary deviants, are all components of labeling's most well-known claim: social control causes deviance. In the preface to his essays in Human Deviance, Social Problems, and Social Control, Lemert (1967; 1972) describes this assertion as "a large turn away from older sociology which tended to rest heavily upon the idea that deviance leads to social control." For Lemert, as well as other labeling analysts, previous theories of deviance fail to see the "forest for the trees;" they seek the causes of deviance in individual pathology, in environmental factors and in subcultural values rather than in the processes by which some people are socially differentiated from others. Although previous theorists, such as the criminologist Sutherland (1939: 1), noted the importance of the processes by which people make rules and the processes by which people react to infractions in understanding deviance, they were seldom incorporated into theory. Consequently, labeling, in that it describes the relationship between social control and deviant outcomes, brings the forest into perspective. But at what cost to the trees, at what cost to an understanding of deviant behavior is this accomplished?

CHAPTER II

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

The usefulness of any criticism depends on two things:
(1) agreement about what is being criticized and (2) agree-
ment about the proper grounds for criticism. Judging from
the literature, labeling's critics do not agree about either
of these matters. Some theorists focus on particular parts
of labeling, arguing that it is too phenomenological (Rock,
1974) or not phenomenological enough (Warren and Johnson,
1972). Others are dismayed by labeling's failure to address
certain traditional questions, such as the origins of deviance
(Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973), variations in rates of
deviance across populations (Merton, 1971; Gibbs, 1966), or
the relativeness of deviance to certain societies (Merton,
1971; Gibbs, 1966). Still others object to labeling's peculiar
ideological undercurrents, seeing it as a scantly disguised
welfare ethic (Gouldner, 1968; Liazos, 1972) as well as a
jaundiced interpretation of social control (Bordua, 1967;
Manning, 1975). Recently, Lemert (1974: 457) accurately de-
scribed the confusion by characterizing the field as "...under
attack from so many different quarters, both for what it is
and for what it is not, that a sense of embattlement is in-
escapable. The diverse, perverse, and tangential nature of

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the criticisms makes it difficult to tell friend from foe."

Undoubtedly, much of the confusion stems from different interpretations of labeling. As we have already seen, the approach is sufficiently loose at certain points to suggest a variety of readings. A number of contraditions, however, result from the assorted grounds on which criticism is based, from the differences in opinion about what a good theory or a good approach to deviance should accomplish. For instance, Gibbs (1966; 1972), perhaps the most prescient critic of labeling, consistently objects to the approach's failure to unambiguously distinguish between deviants and nondeviants. Schur (1971), on the other hand, suggests that this looseness is a theoretical strength of labeling rather than a weakness, for it accurately displays the fluidness of the social world. Neither individuals nor acts are immutably deviant, he argues, and any attempt to make such clear-cut conceptual distinctions is misguided. Gibbs's and Schur's differences are not analytic, for both agree that deviance is socially defined, varying across time and space; their differences are in how best to incorporate relativism in a conceptual scheme.

According to labeling theorists, deviance is better under-stood as a "sensitizing concept" rather than a definitional or operational term. Adopting Blumer's (1969: 140-152) distinc-tion between the two, Schur (1971) argues that previous theories, in that they defined deviance in simplistic either-or terms, obscured the social aspects of a miscreant identity. Acts construed as deviant according to one set of standards may be

acceptable or even demanded by another set. Even when there
is agreement on standards, a deviant act may constitute only
a small segment of a person's behavior. Consequently, Schur
(1971: 15) argues that deviance must always refer "to the set
of standards from which (individuals) are said to deviate and
must always be expressed in terms of degree, variation and
circumstances, rather than in simplistic 'either-or' classi-
fications." This relativeness is best portrayed by a loose,
sensitizing conception of deviant behavior, in which social
processes and the fluidness of the social order are emphasized.

This position accounts for much of labeling's popularity.
The social and relative aspects of deviance that labeling
underscores are consistent with several classical traditions,
such as symbolic interactionism, conflict analysis and
phenomenology (see Schur, 1969; 1971). Moreover, labeling
also converges with several popular ideas about the origins
of deviance. The implied irreversibility of labeling, of
being a "jail bird" or an "ex-con," coincides with several
cultural themes-- the good kid who made one mistake and was
never allowed to live-it-down. More current images of the
deviant are tapped, too. Interviews with topless barmaids
or motorcycle gangs (see Douglas, 1970b) portray deviants
as nonconformists who are misunderstood by society. All of
this gives Schur's argument apparent validity. The popular
images, the popular themes and the appearance of being anchor-
ed in several important sociological traditions suggest label-
ing's contribution as an explanatory framework, and the new

areas of interest, the new subjects for research, suggest its
value as a heuristic tool.

Certainly, labeling has presented new areas for research,
and to a large extent, it has directed sociology and criminology
back to questions about the social origins of deviance. In
this sense, Schur's characterization of deviance as a "sensi-
tizing concept" is quite right. But there is an important
difference between suggestiveness and explanation. The first
often requires a certain looseness; the second always requires
clarity and distinction, qualities labeling clearly lacks.
In an early essay on the general aspects of deviancy theory,
Lemert (1948: 27) himself notes the explanatory ambiguity of
an interactionist approach.

> Interaction is not a theory or explanation at all.
> It does little more than set down a condition of inquiry,
> telling us that dynamic analysis must supplement struc-
> tural analysis, and is best understood as a necessary
> reaction to the metaphysical explanations of human
> behavior current among nineteenth century writers. A
> further reason for rejecting interaction as a theory per
> se is that it results in a directionless inquiry ending
> in a morass of dog-in-the-mangerish variables, none
> of which have priority or provide a formula for
> prediction.

While labeling does claim the significance of formal reactions
as explanatory variables, it fails to clearly define exactly
what such variables explain. To say it explains deviance, is
to say in their own words that it explains a "sensitizing
concept," which is to say very little.

The observations that follow are directed toward labeling's
lack of conceptual clarity and empirical usefulness, its blur-
ring of the trees for the sake of the forest. While labeling

theorists suggest the importance of social processes in producing deviant outcomes, they do not specify exactly what those processes are beyond the most general and rhethorical terms. Categories like "overdog" and "underdog" do not imply any understanding of interest groups or the ways in which diverse interests organize into powerful coalitions. Nor does stating that social control causes deviance explain how those outcomes occur. While ideas like labeling, process, social definitions and social interaction are highly suggestive, they are not developed by labeling analysts, at least not in any way that would benefit meaningful inquiry. Consequently, labeling's conceptual ambiguity is often reflected by the bewilderment of sociologists and criminologists to empirically understand its ideas.

The Conceptual Forest

In several articles, Gibbs (1966; 1972) points out the inherent tensions that exist in labeling between a normative and a reactional conception of deviance. When labeling theorists adhere strictly to a reactional conception, their statements are relative in the extreme. In other words, there can be no expectation of consistency in either the incidence of deviant behavior or in the negative reactions of others, since each situation with its unique circumstances determines whether or not an act is deviant. As Gibbs notes, this is a major shift from a traditional sociological and criminological interest in changing rates of deviance. By conceiving deviance

solely in terms of reactions, labeling analysts provide no in-
sight into why different rates of deviance occur in different
populations. Even if two populations have the same definition
of deviance and react to deviance in the same manner with the
same consistency, it is possible that one population may have
a higher rate of deviancy than the other.

As a result, labeling theorists have not completely
neglected a normative conception, implying it when a reactional
definition seems too unconvincing. For instance, Lemert
(1951; 1967), in his own distinction between primary and
secondary deviance, implies some concensus about what is
"potentially" deviant. Again, both Becker's (1963) suggestion
of "secret deviance" and Lorber's (1967) description of
self-typing denotes some agreement about what is likely to get
a person into trouble. With regard to self-typing, if a per-
son anticipates social reaction, defining himself as deviant
when no actual reaction occurs, it implies some prior know-
ledge of what the community considers right and wrong. The
very idea of "patterned" social reactions, whether it be in
biases toward the lower-classes or in situations that demand
responses, suggests normative agreement on the part of at
least policemen, judges and other officials. Just as people
tend to share some beliefs about what forms of behavior are
appropriate, Gibbs and Clark (1965) argue, they share beliefs
about what forms of reaction are necessitated by certain forms
of misconduct.

In part, labeling's suggestion of normative agreement

results from its failure to explain why and how a label,
whether it be official or not, identifies an act as deviant.
If two boys steal some money from a grocery store and only
one is caught, the one caught by the police obviously faces
different consequences than the one who got away. Does that
mean that the boy who was caught committed a deviant act and
the boy who got away did not? A strict interpretation of
labeling says yes-- but the grocery store owner, the boy who
got away and even the boy who got caught are likely to think
differently. As Gibbs (1966) has pointed out, if the labeling
theorists are right, then the solution to crime is well within
our reach-- close down the courts, close down the police sta-
tions, close down the mental hospitals. If there is no reaction,
there is no deviance.

Schur (1971) is correct in arguing that critics have
tended to overstate labeling's ambiguities with regard to its
treatment of deviant acts and deviant persons. Labeling
theorists do not deny the reality of deviance, as it is some-
times suggested. No one really argues that behavior such as
rape, homicide, mental illness or robbery would disappear if
it was not reacted to by someone. Schur (1971), furthermore,
is correct when he argues that labeling theorists are fully
aware that acts of deviance, for the most part, accompany
social reactions in producing deviant outcomes. Labeling's
focus on social reactions is meant to highlight what is socially
made of an act; it does not mean that reactions are necessary
conditions of deviance. But what Schur, as well as most label-

ing theorists, fails to understand is that by banishing the
normative conception of deviance from their approach, they
also banish any possibility of understanding the discrepency
between infractions and reactions, which rests at the heart
of labeling's appeal. If each situation dictates deviance,
each cluster of circumstances dictates the likelihood of
reactions, there can be no understanding of why certain acts
together are reacted to differently than others. This
question remains unanswered by labeling. It lingers like a
shadow in their writings, suggesting an explanatory analysis,
but it is never permitted to enter as a focus in its own
right. By conceiving deviance as entailing reactions, label-
ing theorists define away the discrepency between reactions
and infractions instead of explaining it.

Setting aside the discrepency revolving around the deviant
act, additional problems are encountered with regard to deviant
identities or secondary deviance. Lemert (1967: 18), to recall,
contends that "a distinction between primary and secondary
deviation is deemed indispensable to a complete understanding
of deviation in modern pluralistic society." The former
involves behavior, which although deviant, carries little or
no consequences for an individual's future behavior; the latter
involves behavior that is organized into a deviant role, that
an individual is committed to as a way of life. Furthermore,
Lemert, like other labeling theorists, contends that the causes
of secondary deviance are different from the causes of primary
deviance. While the distinction between commitment to behavior

is possible, it is difficult to make clear causal distinctions
between the two forms of deviance. Implicit in the approach
is an attempt to explain secondary deviance or "hard-core"
deviance as resulting from labeling (Taylor, Walton and Young,
1973). But it is not clear how the original causes of deviance
give way to the coercive effects of social reactions.

Indeed it is possible to describe deviants who never
come to the attention of social control agents and still per-
sistently commit deviant acts. Becker (1963: 41) himself
argues that "an unknown, but probably quite large number of
people in the United States use marijuana." Obviously, all
of these people have not been labeled "marijuana smokers" by
officials, school administrators or the police; if they had,
it is unlikely that the jails would have any room. Again,
Reiss (1970), in a study on premarital sex, notes that few
adolescents are ever caught engaging in sexual intercourse.
(The Kinsey report recorded only six discoveries out of every
one-hundred thousand reported acts of intercourse.) Yet a
quite larger number, Reiss suggests, adopt deviant sexual
careers. As Akers (1968: 463) pointedly argues, "the label
does not create the behavior in the first place. People can
and do commit deviant acts because of the particular contin-
gencies and circumstances in their lives, quite apart from or
in combination with the labels others apply to them." Com-
mitment to deviance often exists outside of any contact with
social control agencies.

Admittedly, labeling's emphasis on processes provides a

partial solution to distinguishing the causes of primary
from secondary deviance. To the extent that "degrees of
deviance" are identified, it might be argued that continued
deviance after social reactions requires more commitment on
the part of miscreants. Thus the marijuana smoker who gets
caught is more committed to a deviant identity than someone who
smokes marijuana but has never been labeled as such. Never-
theless, prior conditions, prior "degrees of deviance" would
still be important factors in explaining the effects of social
reactions. If the labeling approach was consistent about a
processual explanation of misconduct, it would have to talk
about "degrees" of primary and secondary deviance, which would
render the original distinction useless.

Rather than forfeit the distinction, labeling theorists
usually describe a more truncated version of the "process"
by which people become career miscreants. For the most part,
they emphasize the stigmatizing, compelling impact of official
reactions, obscuring the influence of intial factors in caus-
ing secondary deviance. In this fashion, they locate the fate
and very development of deviants in the reactions of social
control agents (Bordua, 1967). This exaggeration leaves the
impression that individuals are drifters one day and career
deviants the next. Akers (1968: 46) accurately describes
this truncated labeling process.

> One sometimes gets the impression from reading this
> literature that people go about minding their own
> business, and then-- "wham"-- bad society comes along
> and slaps them with a stigmatized label. Forced into
> the role of deviant the individual has no choice but

to be deviant. This is an exaggeration of course, but
such an image can be gained easily from an over-emphasis
on the impact of labeling.

Such an impression also suggests an odd interpretation of
modernity by Lemert and other labeling theorists. By portray-
ing secondary deviance as resulting solely from labeling, they
attribute to the reactions of social control agents the
forces of primitive taboos.

The "penetrating," "debunking" quality of labeling that
has won it so much popular acclaim, rests on this misleading
causal distinction between secondary and primary deviance.
Primary deviants are supposedly like anyone else, engaging in
some deviance, but not to "excess." They cannot be blamed
for their misbehavior, for as Lemert (1967: 51) argues, "while
some fortunate individuals by insightful endowment or by
virtue of the stabilized nature of their situations can fore-
see more distant social consequences of their actions and
behave accordingly, not so most people." Secondary deviants,
in that they are recruited from this blameless body of people,
are thus the unfortunate ones, the unlucky ones who did not
get away. For instance, one implication of Scheff's (1966)
study is that people who are not "really" mentally ill get
categorized as such because of the eccentricity of official
procedures. While this may sometimes be the case, Scheff
never provides a means of distinguishing between those who
are "really" mentally ill and those who are not. Consequently,
in many labeling studies it is hard to distinguish between
what is "penetrating" and mere conceptualization.

As with deviant acts, there is some discrepency between what labeling theorists argue and what they imply. At times they do portray deviance in a processual manner. In these instances, their own studies often disprove that secondary deviance results solely from labeling. For instance, in the Outsiders, Becker (1963) describes the events in which a person becomes a "marijuana smoker." Ironically, it is the lack of social reaction that Becker (1963: 70-71) finds as influencing a person's involvement in a deviant career.

> (Were you making it much at first?) No, not too much.
> Like I said, I was a little afraid of it. But it was
> finally about 1948 that I really began to make it strong.
> (What were you afraid of?) Well, I was afraid that I
> would get too high and not be able to 'op', you dig,
> I mean I was afraid I would get too high, and pass out
> completely, or do stupid things. I didn't want to get
> too wigged. (How did you ever get over that?) Well,
> it's just one of those things, man. One night I turned
> on and I just suddenly felt real great, you know, I was
> really swinging with it. From then on I have just been
> able to smoke as much as I want without getting into
> any trouble about it. I can always control it.

From the passage it is obvious the respondent was aware of the consequences of being too "wigged." And from Becker's own implications the act is deviant, since he describes it as basically disapproved of and illegal. But it is not social reaction but the lack of it that influenced further deviance. Becker's respondent, when he found he could handle the drug in public places without being discovered, "really began to make it strong."

Undoubtedly, labeling theorists do not believe that there is no normative agreement in modern society or that public

labeling is the only cause of secondary deviance. For the
most part, many of the critical arguments presented here have
been based on exaggerations of the labeling position. But
labeling theorists, insofar as they fail to consider normative
agreement, fail to describe the influence of initial causes
and fail to clearly explain the circumstances in which label-
ing leads to miscreant careers, invite these exaggerations.
Although most of the difficulties could be worked out, it
would be at the cost of the approach's causal distinctions
and its popular acclaim as a "debunking" perspective. The
processual model would have to be more clearly specified, in
terms of what kind of reactions, by whom, to what kind of
deviance, in what kind of situations, before labeling's claims
about the impact of social reactions could be fully assessed.
In short, the forest would have to be put in proper perspec-
tive to the trees.

The Empirical Forest

As expected, the general looseness and ambiguity of
labeling has directly affected the quality and type of research
that usually appears in the literature. The problems are
clear. Schur (1971), for instance, describes labeling as con-
centrating on "degrees of deviantness" that result from
someone's efforts to "do something about" illicit behavior.
While labeling theorists are in some agreement that "doing
something about" behavior means official reactions, how much
reaction equals how many "degrees of deviantness?" Traffic

violations are something that most communities feel a need
to do something about, yet is the reaction toward a speeder
equal to the reaction toward a bank robber or an environ-
mental infraction? Which is more deviant? While a rough
continuum is conceivable, one with fairly large categories
equating certain kinds and frequencies of reactions to specific
degrees of deviance, labeling theorists have never developed
one.

To a certain extent, the problem rests in different
research expectations. While previous theories of deviance
have been designed to accomodate quantitative techniques,
labeling is directed more toward qualitative methods. Label-
ing analysis concetrates on matters that are difficult, if not
impossible, to quantify: the development of a deviant identity,✓
the elaboration of deviant careers and roles, the interactional
process between deviants and nondeviants. Even with regard
to the causes of individual deviance, the labeling approach
emphasizes processual contingencies that are too elaborate
for quantification. This point has been made by Cohen (1966:
43), who suggests that the interactional process leading to a
deviant act is best portrayed as a "tree." (see figure 2)
The completed pathway-- A, AA, AAA-- represented by a solid
line is the course of action, according to Cohen, that leads
to a deviant outcome. The other pathways, represented with
broken lines, are the other courses that action could take.
As Cohen argues, pathways are not predictable from initial
states or acts alone; prediction is contingent on the situa-

tion following each move. Using an interactionist perspec-
tive, then, each pathway is an important possibility and each
junction represents an important decision-making process.

Figure 2: Interaction Process and Deviant Outcomes
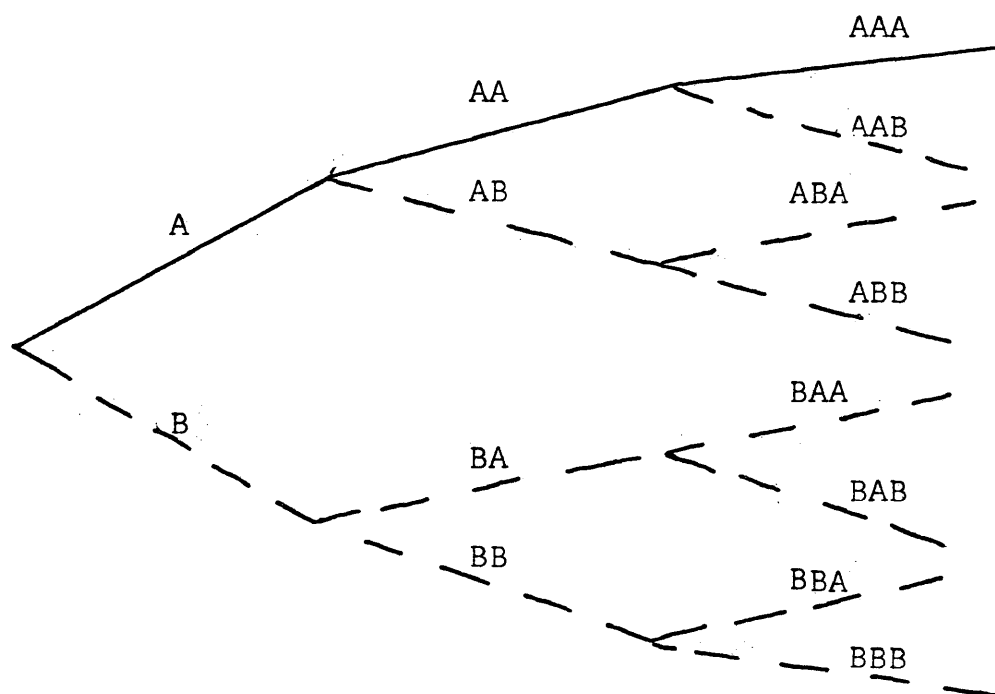
Within the labeling framework, the interactional process
leading to a deviant identity is just as difficult to quanti-
tatively verify. Reconsider point AAA as secondary deviance,
a deviant role and not just a deviant act. Moreover, recon-
sider each junction of lines to be a point in time at which
A or B is socially sanctioned, receiving an official social
reaction. The pathway A--AA--AAA is the most pure example
of an individual's movement into secondary deviance. Provid-

ing some referent of behavior and self-concept could be deriv-
ed, a movement into secondary deviance could be quantitatively
verified by measuring the effects of sanctioning. Now con-
sider the other pathway, particularly the pathway B--BB--BBB.
Using the same referents as before, or any other referents
for that matter, B's movement cannot be said to disprove the
labeling position, for there is no reason to believe that
additional reactions, if the graph were extended, would not
move B more in the direction of secondary deviance. Labeling
provides no time limitations. As Tittle (1975) recently
argues, according to the labeling framework, the presumed
effects can be considered an extension of the labeling process
itself. The lack of time boundaries, then, makes labeling dif-
ficult to prove and almost impossible to disprove, a respondent's
death being the only real boundary.

Consequently, most of the evidence for labeling has been
taken from qualitative research, yet there are some real prob-
lems in interpreting these studies. As a rule, the evidence
is a barrage of quotes which supposedly document the effects
of labeling. The following passage from Goffman's (1963: 16)
Stigma is an example.

> Whenever I fell, out swarmed the women in droves, cluck-
> ing and fretting like a bunch of bereft mother hens. It
> was kind of them, and in retrospect, I appreciate their
> solicitude, but at the time I resented and was greatly
> embarrassed by their inference. For they assumed that no
> routine hazard of skating-- no stick or stone-- upset my
> flying wheels. It was a foregone conclusion that I fell
> because I was a poor helpless cripple. Not one of them
> shouted with outrage, "That dangerous wild bronco threw
> her!"-- which, God forgive, he did technically. It was
> like a horrible ghostly visitation of my roller-skating

> days. All the good people lamenting in chorus, "That
> poor, poor girl fell off!"

It is obvious that the girl dreads the condescending reactions

of others to her handicap. There is no reason, however, to

infer from the passage that such reactions have compelled her

to accept a social role as a cripple. No changes in behavior

are indicated by the passage. Indeed, the passage can only

prove that cripples sometimes receive stereotyped reactions

and that they do not like it.

Even when qualitative research does indicate behavioral

changes, it is sometimes hard to tell whether the changes re-

present secondary deviance or not. For instance, Scott (1969),

developing some of Goffman's ideas, describes five ways in

which the blind manage stigmatization. The first, the "true

believer," concurs both behaviorally and subjectively with the

stereotypes presented by sighted people. Other blind persons,

however, manage to insulate part of their self image from the

assaults made by normals; these people conform behaviorally

but define themselves subjectively as different from other

blind persons. A third adaptation involves deliberately

assuming a facade of compliance in order to ease interactional

problems that are caused by stereotypes. Still others adopt

the facade for profit. Blind beggars, who literally exact a

price for their compliance, Scott places in this category.

Finally, some blind persons actively resist the stereotypes.

Which of these five adaptations, according to labeling, is

secondary deviance? The first type clearly is, but the remain-

ing four are not so easily described as examples of secondary

deviance. Of course, labeling theorists could argue, as
Scott largely does, that the five adaptations are "degrees
of career deviance." Still, Scott's descriptions portray
some blind persons as having more control over their situa-
tions than originally described by Lemert.

Quantitative research also presents some interpretive
problems. Recidivism, for example, is often assumed to be the ✓
most likely measure of secondary deviance, yet meaningful
rates of reoccurring criminality are hard to obtain. As Tittle
(1975) argues, rearrest is a poor indicator, since known ✓
delinquents and ex-convicts are more likely to be arrested
independent of actual criminal behavior. Even if conviction ✓
rates are used, they may represent something entirely different
from career deviance. These rates include parole violations ✓
of an uncriminal type, such as unmarried cohabitation or
leaving a certain area without permission. Even when convic-
tion indicates further deviance, it is questionable whether
those rates represent secondary deviance. Does conviction for
a gambling offense provide evidence of career deviance for
someone initially convicted of armed robbery? Again, this is
a problem of unspecified "degrees of deviance."

Aware of these problems, some researchers suggest measur-
ing changes in subjective states as a test of labeling. "ob-
jective behavioral measures," Meade (1974: 88) argues, "either
in the form of official records or self-report responses, lack
the sensitivity required for valid testing of the labeling
process." Unfortunately, there are problems in interpreting
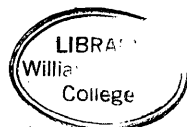
subjective measures as well. In part, the problem is the same as that with qualitative studies using personal reflections: changes in behavior or in self-concept cannot be inferred simply from subjective moods. While it could be argued that permanent changes in subjective states would measure the impact of labeling, such an experiment would require time series data, which most quantitative studies fail to obtain. A study by Gibbs (1974) demonstrates clearly the need for time series data. While he found delinquents to have low feelings of self worth prior to court dispositions, their subjective mood was comparable with nondelinquents after the judge had made his decision. Accordingly, if studies do not obtain time series data, not even the failure of deviants to record feelings of stigma can be used as proof that labeling does not occur. While many researchers have documented a lack of stigmatization among mental patients and delinquents (see Foster, Dinitz and Reckless, 1972; O'Connor, 1970; Kirk, 1974; Freeman and Simmons, 1961), their findings can only be interpreted as inconclusive.

Perhaps the most interesting efforts to quantitatively measure labeling are the studies of deterrence. Recently, several theorists (see Thorsell and Klemke, 1972; Tittle, 1975) have noted the similarity between labeling and the much older deterrence perspective. Both are interested in how and why certain groups respond to particular behavior, and both are interested in the effects of those responses (Tittle, 1975). The major difference, of course, is the prediction of the

effects of sanctioning, the deterrence model suggesting that people are repelled from deviance by official reactions. Chambliss (1966), for instance, found parking violations to decrease as punishment became more certain and severe. Similarly, in a study of shoplifting, Cameron (1964) found nonprofessional "snitches" to refrain from stealing after they were apprehended for the first time, being caught and compelled to admit they were "thieves" or "criminals" proved too discordant with their self images as housewives and good citizens. Other studies of deterrence, especially those controlling for certainty and severity of punishment, have documented similar findings (see Schwartz, 1969; Waldo and Chirico, 1972; Tittle and Rowe, 1974). While these studies do not disprove labeling, they do suggest that the effects of official reactions are more complex than labeling theorists usually imply.

Besides the effects of social reactions, some of labeling's other claims present empirical problems for research. In particular, the studies investigating the application of labels by official control agents, especially when taken together, are difficult to interpret. In two critiques of Scheff's (1966) study, Gove (1970a; 1970b) argues that behavioral factors, other than those implied by stereotypes, are crucial in determining who is admitted into mental hospitals. He lists several studies (see Mendal and Rapport, 1969; Bittner, 1967b) that report public officials process only those whose behavior has become too serious, too troublesome to the community. The evidence, according to Gove, is that the vast majority of

persons admitted to mental hospitals do have some "real

disturbance." Studies in the area of juvenile delinquency

have produced an equal amount of conflicting evidence. In

their review of the literature, Thomas and Sieverdes (1975:

416) go so far as to say, "even a superficial review of the

relevant literature leaves one with the rather uncomfortable

feeling that the only consistent finding of prior research is

that there are no consistencies in the determinants of the

decision-making process." (see Goldman, 1969; Wilson, 1968;

Terry, 1967; Pawlak, 1973; Arnold, 1971)

Several reasons for these inconsistencies have been sug-

gested. Bordua (1967) argues that some discrepency can be

accounted for by different levels involved in processing

deviants. The policeman on his beat, the intake officer mak-

ing decisions and the judge in his courtroom all face different

situations with different interests. Thomas and Cage (1975)

suggest another explanation: inconsistencies result from the

different ways researchers operationalize labeling's concepts.

Since labeling theorists never specify the "degrees of reaction"

they have in mind, different measures are quite likely. But

this inconsistency makes it almost impossible to relate the

findings of one study to another. In other words, are stereo-

types in probation referrals equivalent to stereotypes in

commitment decisions, or is selectiveness in the juveniles

picked up by police the same as selectiveness in those that

are adjudicated? Still another explanation is that differences

in social control agencies greatly influences the manner in

which labels are applied. Gove (1970a; 1970b) suggests that
some of Scheff's claims are likely to occur in older mental
institutions. With regard to juvenile delinquency, Wilson
(1968) argues that stereotypes are more likely in the arrests
of traditional police departments than in professional ones.

Empirically, the labeling approach is somewhat of a night-
mare. Whether using qualitative or quantitative techniques,
the approach fails to specify what measures are appropriate
or even what boundaries are proper on the time it takes for
a "conversion." As Lemert (1951: 74) originally described it,
movement into secondary deviance may be gradual or "self-defi-
nitions or self-realizations (may) be the result of sudden
perceptions." While there have been some quantitative studies
suggesting deviant outcomes from labeling (see Ageton and
Elliot, 1974; Williams and Gold, 1972), the difficulty of
operationalizing measures makes it hard to access their
importance. Most of the suggestive studies have been quali-
tative, yet with few exceptions they have also been unsystem-
atic, making their finding inconclusive. Davis (1972: 457-458)
tersely describes this aspect of labeling research as suffer-
ing from a "methodological inhibition in which conceptual
impoverishment is facilitated by an absorption with general
imagery, with unsystematic, elusive, and suggestive empirical
presentations, rather than definitive tests of an interaction
framework." The same could be said of labeling's research
into the application of labels. Qualitative research, such
as Cicourel's (1968) or Piliavin's and Briar's (1964), suggest

the workings of official stereotypes, yet more systematic
quantitative efforts reveal a much more complex picture, in-
fluenced by levels of organization and kinds of social reac-
tions. In both instances, labeling fails to specify its key
concepts enough to clear up the empirical confusion.

What can be said of labeling? Certainly it brought
the forest, brought an emphasis on social processes, into its
approach. But emphasizing what is socially made of an act or
person and providing the framework for understanding these
things are two different matters. The one involves rhetoric,
the other conceptual depth. Labeling, for the most part,
seems more rhetorical than lucid. Rather than develop some
of the issues it raised about earlier theories, like the
difference between normative and reactional conceptions of
deviance, it defined the issue away. Rather than develop the
circumstances under which people might become secondary de-
viants or attempt to explain why some people never become
secondary deviants, labeling theorists defined the exceptions
away. Labeling brought in the forest, but it obscured the
trees. Undoubtedly, the idea of secondary deviance, the
differential selection and application of labels to deviants,
and the issues of normative and reactional discrepency can all
be clarified, developed and tested. But in order to do so
some of labeling's more cherished claims will have to be for-
feited, and a fresh look will have to be taken at the forest
once again.

CHAPTER III

SOME NOTES ON DEVIANCE IN MODERN SOCIETIES

Pointing out labeling's conceptual confusion is not the same as pointing out its conceptual uselessness. While clarity is the prize of science, it is not the only goal. On occassion more can be learned from an obscure approach and the reasons for its obscurity than from the most precisely stated theories. Loose ends sometimes provide a means by which to unravel the most complicated ideas or a means by which to at least distinguish some of an idea's major strands. Labeling, with its focus on what is socially made of an act, provides such an occassion.

Despite some eighty years of research, sociologists and criminologists are still puzzled about what precisely is deviant behavior. Although theorists traditionally define deviance as a normative transgression, many rightfully argue that this conception deceptively implies a clear distinction between deviant acts and conforming ones. For instance, some years ago, Simmons (1969) conducted a study in which he asked 180 people to indicate what behavior they considered to be deviant. His respondents listed over one thousand examples of miscreant behavior, ranging from wearing a beard and "going straight" to homosexuality and murder. Simmon's research

clearly demonstrates that almost any act is deviant in the eyes of someone, but in whose eyes are sociologists to view deviant behavior?

Even if it is argued, as many sociologists do, that deviance is the transgression of major rules, of widespread cultural standards, a normative definition is still misleadingly straightforward. For one thing, many theorists question whether any broad cultural norms can be identified in modern societies, or whether they exist only within subcultures and smaller collectivities. Even with regard to codified norms or the law, people disagree significantly about when a law applies or whether it should be applied at all. Then too, some sociologists argue that norms are best visualized as flexible rules and elastic standards, applying to only certain situations, at certain times and to certain people. Even a moment's reflection suggests a great many examples that occur in modern societies. If the actions of people do not always match the community standards to which they give verbal allegience, are all normative infractions to be considered deviant behavior?

In recent years, labeling theorists have unraveled some major strands of deviance. Their emphasis on the social definition of situations, on the manner in which people negotiate or fail to negotiate the moral meanings of their actions, highlights the flexibility of norms in modern communities. In this sense, labeling theorists (Erikson, 1966; Douglas, 1970a) have described the study of deviance as the analysis of the construc-

tion and reaffirmation of moral meanings in everyday life.
As an aspect of moral negotiation in modern societies, label-
ing highlights the role social reactions, varying both in
intensity and form, play in arbitrating definitions of deviance.
By including less aberrant forms of deviance, such as the
mentally ill, the handicapped and the blind, labeling analysts
portray the different forms reactions take in modern communi-
ties, and concomitantly the different consequences reactions
create in defining situations. But the final arbitrator of ✓
deviance for labeling is the official social control mechanism.
In this sense, labeling theorists describe social control as ✓
the mechanism by which modern communities deal with moral am-
biguity: it labels certain forms of behavior as unacceptable;
it interprets the point at which "something must be done;" it
provides a class of 'outsiders' as referents for less official
decision-making. With these strands, labeling attempts to
weave an inherently modern conception of deviant behavior.

Some of the reasons why labeling fails to elaborate these
insights, fails to follow through with these strands, have
already been shown. For the most part, the reasons presented
in the previous section represent labeling's unique failures,
unique conceptual and empirical problems. There is at least
one other reason, however, and this it shares with many theories
of deviance: it fails to distinguish social types of deviance.
Although Schur (1971) and others describe deviance as a
"sensitizing concept," encompassing "degrees" of social dis-
approval, they never suggest a manner in which these "degrees"

might be seen as types. Rather they leave the discomforting impression of building a "thermometer of deviance," by which each degree of deviance can be seen to correspond to a degree of reaction, and the social boiling point represents the entrance of official control agents. It is an odd impression for an approach that rejects a great deal of quantitative research because it presumably neglects to understand the subjective meanings attached to forms of deviant behavior.

While there are a great many types used in both sociology and criminology (see Clinard and Quinney, 1973), few are developed in a manner consistent with labeling's concern for the social meanings of deviant behavior. A majority of constructs are empirical typologies, developed by correlating different behavioral, legal and social variables in order to identify property space. Still other typologies are developed around the social contexts in which deviance occurs (Lindesmith and Dunham, 1941; Gibbons, 1965) or the behavioral systems in which crime occurs (Clinard and Quinney, 1973). A few attempts at conceptual grouping have been applied to inmate cultures (Irwin and Cressey, 1964; Schrag, 1966). Perhaps the typology most consistent with labeling's focus is one developed by Cavan (1962), in which principal consideration is given to public reaction and the criminal's reaction to the public. Cavan's analysis of interaction between criminals and the public produced seven types of deviant behavior, ranging from criminal contraculture to minor overconformity to ideological contraculture. Although Cavan's typology, as well as some of the

others, provide some insights into the different social

dimensions of deviance, it is not developed to distinguish

social meanings attached to deviant behavior.

In the pages that follow, four ideal types of deviance

will be constructed. Keeping with labeling's focus, the types

will be developed using kinds of reactions, consequences of

reactions and the social meanings appropriate to each. A

quick review of the literature suggests agreement about four

distinct areas of research, each with distinct social defini-

tions: (1) respectable, (2) involuntary, (3) aberrant and

(4) dissident deviance. While there is general agreement that

these areas can be distinguished, their conversion into ideal

types and the manner in which they then should be used is like-

ly to be more controversial. Some years ago, Weber (1949:

49-112) described ideal types as the conceptual strategy of

the social sciences; today few sociologists consciously use

the technique, considering it too impressionistic and empiri-

cally rootless (Sjoberg and Nett, 1968). Consequently, a brief

explanation of Weber's contention and the current misunderstand-

ing about ideal types is in order before turning to the

development of the constructs.

The Logic of Ideal Types

Some current misunderstanding about ideal types stem from

Weber's own presentation of the technique. In a series of

important essays about methodology in the social sciences,

Weber (1949: 93) makes several clear statements about what is

not an ideal type: they cannot be defined by "genus proximum"
or "differentia specifica;" they are not hypotheses to be
tested or categories under which concrete examples can be sub-
sumed. In other words, ideal types are not averages or
natural classifications of social variables, and thus they
cannot be empirically verified. But when it comes to describ-
ing precisely what is an ideal type, Weber is considerably
less clear, relying on metaphors to make his point.

> An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation
> of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of
> a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present
> and occassionally absent concrete individual phenomena,
> which are arranged according to those one-sidedly
> emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytic construct.
> It cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality.
> It is a utopia.

Unfortunately, this passage provides little additional under-
standing of what is an ideal type, since metaphors are hard
to pin down. Consequently, interpretations of Weber's presen-
tation have tended to rest on his negative statements. But as
any logician will argue, negative definitions provide innumer-
able opportunities for misinterpretation.

Not surprisingly, several misconceptions about ideal
types are held by many sociologists and criminologists. For
one, some theorists argue that Weber's constructs are unlikely
to be useful, since they are both impressionistic and empiri-
cally rootless. After all, how does someone test a utopia?
For Weber, of course, you do not, at least not in the sense of
a hypothesis to be proven or disproven by empirical facts.
But this does not mean that Weber saw ideal types as empirically

rootless or as unverifiable. Judging from Weber's own use
of ideal types (see Bendix, 1962), it is possible to use these
constructs to describe "adequate causal relations" (Weber,
1949: 80) of historical events, such as India's caste system
or the development of American capitalism. In order to
accomplish this, Weber argues, ideal types must be based on
"meaningful" traits-- that is, they must capture the idea
behind certain social acts; he referred to this aspect of
ideal types as "general empirical rules" that reflect the way
in which men and women are likely to behave in certain situ-
ations. Consequently, ideal types can be verified. To the
extent that they capture ideas of practical significance, they
will have logical significance for social scientists. In this
sense, the validity of an ideal type rests not on its empiri-
cal replication, but on the extent to which it can guide in-
vestigations, suggest adequate causal relationships and lead
to more precise understanding of the social world.

Still another misconception revolves around using ideal
types as typologies (see Clinard and Quinney, 1973; Wood,
1969). In an essay on methodology, Wood (1969: 239) argues
that ideal types must satisfy the requirements of any typology:
"(1) Are the assumptions regarding the theoretical links be-
tween variables of the type capable of being tested empirically?
(2) Does the classification of cases by the typology lead to
more convincing demonstrations of their explanation?" A close
reading of Weber, however, suggests that ideal types cannot
be seen as typologies. For one, typologies are matrices

composed of several different dimensions of equal conceptual importance. By classifying cases into various cells of the matrix, relationships between the original dimensions can be discovered. Ideal types, however, are constructed by accenting a single dimension which in itself suggests an "objectively possible" causal relationship (Weber, 1949: 92). Furthermore, the function of an ideal type is not to provide a scheme for classification, but to provide an ideal construct with which to elaborate significant components of social phenomena. In other words, research faces the task of determining the extent to which these constructs reflect reality-- the extent, for instance, the economic organization of a city can be viewed as a "city-economy" or the domination of a state can be seen as "legal-rational." While both ideal types and typologies are essentially heuristic devices, the logical significance of ideal constructs rests in its ability to elaborate dissimilarities as well as similarities with social phenomena.

The previous paragraph provides the elements with which to make a positive description of ideal types. Ideal types, according to Weber, are neither empirically rootless nor typologies with which to classify social phenomena. Instead they are interpretive schemes based on patterns of behavior that suggest "subjectively meaningful" relations between different aspects of social phenomena. In this manner, ideal types are both heuristic tools and the basis for theoretical construction. On the one hand, they provide an ideal. a limiting construct to compare with and thus survey the significant

components of social relations; on the other hand, by focus-
ing on values and motivations of practical significance,
they suggest adequate causal relations between social phenom-
ena. In this fashion, the final judge of any ideal type
is its utility in understanding the social world.

To illustrate, Hempel (1963) argues that these aspects
of ideal types can accurately be compared to theories of
natural sciences, particularly those found in physics. In
the natural sciences, Hempel explains, a unique event is
accounted for by the prior or concomitant occurrence of
several variables in an ideal situation. Galileo's law of
gravity, for instance, argues that objects of equal density
fall at equal velocities in a vacuum. By this relationship,
Galileo suggests several variables important in understanding
the effects of gravity. Similarly, with regard to charismatic
domination, Weber outlines the variables pertinent to under-
standing authority based on the "extraordinary qualities of
a leader" (see Bendix, 1962: 298-328). When taken together,
these variables describe a cause of domination in an ideal
situation. In this sense, Weber's explanation of charismatic
leadership, like Galileo's law of gravity, provides a point
of comparison with which to interpret reality. Accordingly,
Weber uses this ideal type to explicate the manner in which
Christ's personal charisma was institutionalized in the
Catholic Church of the Holy Roman Empire. The value of ideal
types, like the value of many laws in physics, rests in heuristic
and interpretive potential.

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Ideal types are particularly amenable to the issues characteristic of the labeling approach. Both share a focus on definitions of situations, on subjective meanings attached to behavior and both suggest causal relationships revolving around those meanings. Furthermore, ideal types are essentially heuristic devices to be used for conceptual elaboration. In a passage that could serve as an insight for labeling analysts, Weber (1949: 102) makes this quite clear.

> In the interest of the concrete demonstration of an
> ideal type or of an ideal-typical developmental
> sequence, one seeks to make it clear by the use of con-
> crete illustrative material drawn from empirical-histori-
> cal reality. The danger in this procedure which in it-
> self is entirely legitimate lies in the fact that his-
> torical knowledge appears as a servant of theory instead
> of the opposite role.

In other words, if labeling theorists had originally portrayed secondary deviance as an ideal construct, they would have compared it to various situations, highlighting the influences that <u>prevent</u> labeling in order to better understand the influences that <u>reinforce</u> deviant careers. Consequently, ideal constructs are a particularly useful device for clearing up some of the conceptual confusion surronding labeling's treatment of the social meanings of deviance.

Four Ideal Types of Deviance

The following pages will present four ideal types of miscreant behavior: (1) respectable, (2) involuntary, (3) aberrant and (4) dissident deviance. From the previous statements on ideal types, the characteristics of these constructs can be quickly described. Keeping with Weber's design, the attributes,

values and behavior accented by each type will be based on
"general empirical rules"-- that is, they will be drawn with
an eye for establishing an adequate causal relation. Keep-
ing with labeling's concerns, the subjective meanings attach-
ed to each form of deviance will be related to corresponding
social reactions and consequences of sanctioning. For these
ideal types, verification rests with their heuristic potential
and theoretical suggestiveness, rather than with their exact
correspondence to actual social phenomena.

Respectable deviance-- Although informed middle-Americans
overwhelmingly see the problem of crime in terms of lower-class
behavior, they are also quite aware of many other forms of
deviance that appear in the newspapers everyday. Watergate,
for instance, with its lengthy cast of characters and melo-
dramatic moments, was probably the most publicly broadcasted
American scandal since McCarthy and his "witch hunts" during
the 1950s. But when it finally came to an end and Nixon
resigned, it was not at all clear what Americans considered
to be serious. Across the nation prominent newsmen gave public
sighs of relief-- the crisis was over, the scandal put to rest,
Americans would be saved from the "torments" of Impeachment.
And sighs were given by less prominent Americans, too; not
because the Presidency had been spared, but because they had
been spared from the torments of week after week of televised
Impeachment hearings. To a large extent, the seriousness of
Nixon's crime was not that he had covered up a burglary, but

that he had covered it up so badly and caused so much trouble.

Mills referred to such events as news of higher immoralities, and he suggested that Americans were quite accustomed and hardly surprised by its announcement. But to a certain extent, this higher immorality is also a lower immorality. Research on embezzlement, employee pilfrage, traffic violations, shoplifting and similar forms of respectable crime suggest that these infractions are quite widespread, exceeding the more conventional forms of deviance in losses of property and life. In a study of traffic violations, for instance, Ross (1960-61) notes that 37,000 people died in auto accidents as compared to 3,850 cases of murder and non-negligent manslaughter in 1958. Similarly, Schur (1969) suggests that the total amount of losses resulting from embezzlement are probably twice as much as the total amount of losses accruing from burglaries, armed robberies, auto thefts and pickpocketing. Both higher and lower immoralities are quite widespread in America, costing people considerably more than conventional forms of crime. Why, then, does it raise so little alarm?

One reason is that these are forms of respectable deviance. In traditional societies, respectable deviance is clearly defined by sacred ceremonies, in which normally miscreant acts are encouraged and legitimized. In modern societies, the social boundaries of respectable deviance are considerably less clear; perhaps disasters are the most clearly legitimate grounds for deviance (Dynes, 1970). Nevertheless, respectable

deviance in modern communities is shaped and promoted by underlying values within American culture (Schur, 1969). For instance, business practises reflect two conflicting poles of values. On the one hand, transactions are supposedly governed by a code of ethics which emphasizes honesty, trust and public accountability; on the other hand, the smart business deal, the quick transaction and the 'con' are also values of the business world. For those who engage in illegal activity, there is a ready made list of justifications and values with which to define their behavior as respectable deviance.

Respectable deviance is misconduct by respectable people occurring in respectable situations or occupations. Such behavior only occassionally provokes strong social reactions, since in many ways it is supported by values that either directly encourage deviance or justify it as a common form of misconduct. This is particularly true with regard to amateur shoplifters who steal as if they were competing against store officials. Accordingly, in these instances, deviance is a positive attribute. He is a "strong" President; she is a clever operator; she is a smart businesswoman. In the eyes of the respectable deviant, and often in the eyes of those who react to him, he is not a criminal; while his actions may be technically against the law, his behavior is not immoral. It is probably for this reason that when respectable deviants are caught and confronted with criminal labels they often discontinue any further misconduct, the label being too incongruous with their personal image (Cameron, 1964).

Involuntary deviance-- Involuntary deviants are seen as

not responsible for their behavior. All societies in some

form or another recognize this type. In traditional communi-

ties, involuntary deviants are likely to be seen as possessed

by a demon or some evil spirit. Whichever is the case, the

social meaning is the same: "this person cannot be blamed for

his behavior." In modern societies, the amount of involuntary

deviance is likely to be greater than that characterizing

more traditional communities. Yet, this increase results from

the redefining of involuntary deviance rather than from an

actual increase in its occurrence. Modern communities give

rise to specialization, and along with this trend is a rise

in deviance specialists.

In recent years, Kittrie (1973) notes, this trend has

been particularly evident in America. While criminal law in

traditional societies assesses blame, determines degrees of

guilt and punishes miscreants accordingly, America has witness-

ed a subtle departure from these functions in its criminal

system. A different legal model has steadily been developing

which is described variously as "civil," "therapeutic" or

"parens patrie." In this system, according to Kittrie, little

or no emphasis is placed on an individual's guilt, rather

importance is attached to a person's physical, mental or social

shortcomings. When dealing with deviants, society is said to

act in a parental role (parens patrie), seeking not to punish

but to change, resocialize, treat or cure the miscreant through

some appropriate therapy. The consequences for involuntary

deviants are subtly different from those of other miscreants. Under the criminal model, a deviant, say a prostitute, is punished; she is given a fine to pay, a sentence to serve or possibly both. Under the therapeutic model, however, the prostitute is not punished but treated, and the treatment, which may be complete confinement, is not terminated until an expert decides she has been "cured." While the differences may be subtle, they are certainly crucial.

Perhaps the most obvious example of involuntary deviance is mentall illness, yet similarities can be found in several other forms of illicit behavior as well. Lorber (1967), for example, suggests that sick roles are convenient labels with which to manage personal problems. In the factory setting, in personal relations and in interactional situations disability is sometimes faked to provide a legitimate reason for escaping obligations. Similarly, in recent years alcoholism has been defined as a disease. Principally through the efforts of Alcoholics Anonymous, Trice and Roman (1970) argue, an "allergy concept" of alcoholism has been gained. According to this view, those who become alcoholics possess a physiological allergy to alcohol, and consequently their addiction is determined long before they ever take their first drink. As Trice and Roman (1970: 540) argue, "the significance of this concept is that it serves to diminish, both in the perceptions of A.A. members and their (family and friends), the alcoholic's responsibility for developing the behavioral disorder."

While the significance of involuntary deviance rests
in a disavowel of responsibility and in the corresponding
efforts by experts to return the miscreant to a "responsible"
state, the consequences vary according to the instances. For
example, members of Alcoholics Anonymous actively seek to di-
minish any interpretation of their behavior as mentally ill.
The idea of an allergy is conspicously medical, and the organ-
ization visibly attempts to associate itself with the medical
profession (Trice and Roman, 1970). In the case of physical
or medical disorders, a person is not blamed; in the case of
mental disorders, a person is not trusted. Regardless of
the form, however, involuntary miscreants are not blamed for
their behavior, and to the extent that they are subjected to
therapy, they are reliant on the discretion of those experts
who define deviance.

Aberrant deviance-- When most Americans talk about the
crime problem, they talk about aberrant deviance. In tradi-
tional societies, she is the woman perpetually in the stocks
or the man being led slowly up the steps to the public gallows.
In modern communities, she is the woman being picked up by the
vice squad or the man serving a life sentence in a Federal
Penitentiary. They are the murderers, the armed robbers, the
rapists, the muggers. Their behavior is feared, and their
faces are strikingly lower-class. For the most part, these
are the people that middle- and upper-America pay lawyers,
judges, policemen, prison guards and prison officials to
manage, to protect them from.

As the term aberrant implies, these deviants are seen
as morally inept, at least by conventional society. Their
behavior is against the law, and unlike respectable deviance
it is viewed as wrong. Their deviation from the standards
are seen as culpable and a reflection of their personal
character. When Mead and Durkheim spoke of behavior that
aroused public anger, provoked the taste for revenge and re-
awakened in the community a sense of moral solidarity, they
were describing aberrant deviance. Accordingly, this form
can provoke intense reactions from communities, and, indeed,
popular lore and actual history are full of examples. Dur-
ing the Chicago democratic convention in 1968, the police en-
gaged in what many saw as respectable deviance when they
clubbed and beat demonstrators protesting American involvement
in Viet Nam. Undoubtedly there were a number of reasons for
the police's use of "unusual tactics," such as Daley's conven-
tion floor power tactics, it was in part a community reaction
to perceived aberrant deviance.

Aberrant behavior, like respectable deviance, is generally
seen as guided by personal interests. Unlike respectable
deviants, however, aberrant persons are not as fearful of a
criminal label. Irwin and Cressey (1964) suggest that prison
cultures are influenced by several more general deviant cul-
tures. Two of these, thief and convict cultures, actually con-
tain values regarding behavior during imprisonment. Thieves
or professional criminals, Irwin and Cressey argue, face a
reoccurring problem of imprisonment. Consequently, most are

aware of norms and patterns of behavior which apply to the prison situation, and information on how to manage the prison experience-- how to do time "standing on your head"-- with the least amount of suffering and in the minimum amount of time. Those who Irwin and Cressey describe as convicts also face a reoccurring adjustment to imprisonment. But for these "hard core" prisoners, the majority of which are lower-class, norms and patterns of behavior appropriate to the prison situation are recognizable in America's lower-class values. In both cases, the aberrant deviant is aware of the criminality of his behavior, and he is prepared to manage the sanctions applied to him because of it.

The aberrant deviant, like the respectable deviant, contains both an image of the offender and an image of the offense. Study after study, Clinard and Quinney (1973) argue, portray the aberrant offenses, aberrant victims and aberrant offenders as being part of the poorest and most deteriorated sections of the major cities. The aberrant pursues his behavior for personal interests, and frequently he is aware of norms that suggest the proper means of coping with imprisonment or official reactions. The consequences of reactions are varied, but at times when sanctions are harsh, they are likely to stir anxiety and anger from the aberrant themselves. While aberrants tend to be morally indifferent toward their behavior, neither condemning nor justifying it, they do perceive a sense of justice, a set of informal rules that govern the breaking and enforcing of laws. Since sanctions can vary

in intensity, a sense of injustice sometimes occurs, giving

objection not so much to the rules but to the rule enforcers.

Dissident deviance-- Merton (1971) has referred to this

form of behavior as nonconforming. In a brief section of his

Contemporary Social Problems, Merton argues that there is

considerable difference between the courageous highwaymen of

seventeenth-century England and the equally courageous noncon-

formists, like Oliver Cromwell, of that same time. While such

a distinction seems obvious, it is one made easy by historical

detachment. In the instance of the Chicago riot, there were

a great many judgments at the time that made the leaders of

the march little more than criminals (or worse yet communists)

heading up a sizable band of hoodlums and miscreants. These

deviants, especially becuase they tend toward organized pro-

test, can only be euphemistically called nonconformists. The

term dissident is more appropriate.

Aberrant, involuntary and dissident deviance are very

closely related forms of miscreant behavior; the distinction

between each resting for the most part on whose view is being

considered. Dissidents, in that they openly violate community

norms, challenging the legitimacy of established values, are

often seen by officials as aberrants. At other times, dissi-

dents, especially if thy deviate alone, are sometimes defined

as involuntary miscreants. In both instances, the effect is

the same: community definitions neutralize the appeal to

"higher values" or an "ultimate morality." From Solzhenitsyn's

portrayal of Soviet political control and the history of the

student movement in the sixties, both methods, aberrant and
involuntary counterdefinitions, are viable, modern responses
to dissident behavior.

Dissidence is usually not a private form of deviance.
The dissident is not trying to make extra dollars by juggling
the books; nor is he making a living by stealing from others.
The dissident deviates for a new morality or for the restora-
tion of an old social goal. Unlike the involuntary deviant,
the dissident accepts responsibility for his actions; unlike
the aberrant and respectable deviant, he disavows legitimacy
of the social standards, seeking by his actions to either change
the law or bring into focus a new standard. For these reasons,
the dissident often seeks to be publicly caught, to be given
a chance to publicly voice his opinion. Consequently, sanc-
tioning by police, judges and others often leads to increased
dissidence, increased attempts to make opinions and views
known to those who will listen. The actions of the Viet Nam
protestors, such as Abbie Hoffman, for example, were directed
toward making actions more visible, particularly after their
initial confrontation with authorities.

Dissidence is not easily carried out alone. The ability
to make a dissident definition stick depends largely on the
legitimacy of others. It is easier for the dissident to con-
vince others that he acts not for personal gain if he does not
act alone. In the same way, it is easier for the dissident to
avoid an involuntary label if he does not act alone. The
ability to organize, to present conflicting views in a group

setting, largely determines the dissident definition. Regard-

less of organization or group support, however, dissidents

are likely to seek out public sanctioning, and increased

sanctioning is likely to encourage increased dissidence.

A Brief Application: Juvenile Delinquency

Part of the utility of ideal types rests in their mutual

exclusiveness on an analytic level, another part rests in

their relationships in actual social phenomena. Weber, for

instance, constructed his ideal types of domination in order

to analytically accent three dimensions of authority: charisma,

traditional and legal-rational. As precise ideal points of

view, they demonstrate their value by organizing the diverse

aspects of a dimension into logically consistent analytic

units. But their most impressive demonstration of value rests

in their application to social phenomena. Accordingly, Weber

uses each type to reveal the tensions and modified relations

inherent in the other forms of domination. In construction,

each type represents a single logically possible causal re-

lation; in application, each type provides a point of compari-

son with which to understand a number of social phenomena,

casual relations and thus theoretically possible interpreta-

tions. In this sense, Weber rightfully insisted that ideal

types be verified according to their heuristic potential rather

than according to their exact replication by empirical facts.

Consequently, the four ideal types just presented must

be applied in order to suggest their heuristic validity. As

the previous presentation shows, these types do overlap in

reality and do suggest relationships between themselves. At

one point, the connections between involuntary, aberrant and

dissident deviance were outlined, along with some of the cir-

cumstances that affect the application of these social defi-

nitions. At another point, the relationships between respec-

table and aberrant deviance, particularly with regard to

nonprofessional shoplifters, were touched upon. Additional

applications are needed, however, before determining the

heuristic potential of these types. In the following para-

graphs, a brief application of the types to juvenile delin-

quency suggests some of this interpretive potential.

The American juvenile justice system reflects an involun-

tary model of deviance. The official role of court officials,

probation officers and welfare agents is to "treat" the delin-

quent, preventing him from going on to become an aberrant

deviant. While culpability and punishment do play a part in

the juvenile justice system, they are, at least officially,

subordinate to the role of "parens patrie." The Standard

Juvenile Court Act, proposed by the National Council on Crime

and Delinquency and designed to serve as a voluntary model for

various states, exemplifies the therapeutic discretion invested

in juvenile justice officials.

> The court shall have exclusive original jurisdiction in
> proceedings: 1. Concerning any child who is alleged to
> have violated any federal, state or local law or municipal
> ordinance, regardless of where the violation occurred...
> 2. Concerning any child...(b) whose environment is

> injurious to his own or others' welfare; or
> (c) who is beyond the control of his parents or
> cutodian. (Kittrie, 1973: 117)

While the first clause seeks specificty, the second clause
of the Act invests an almost limitless amount of discretion
in the juvenile official. An adult must be charged with a
criminal act if he is going to be held by the police; but a
juvenile may be held because he lives in an "unsuitable"
environment or is "beyond" the control of his parents, regard-
less of whether he is accused of committing any criminal act.
As Kittrie (1973: 117) argues, this represents "...the perplex-
ing possibility under the juvenile court system whereby a
person can lose his liberty not for something he does but
for something he is."

Delinquents, however, are unlikely to view the juvenile
justice system in the same manner. Unlike with mental or
physical health, there is no widespread interpretation of
delinquency as involuntary, the logical connection being con-
siderably more tenuous. Consequently, while juvenile officials
operate according to the expectations of an involuntary system
of treatment, delinquents, depending on their behavior and
socioeconomic status, are likely to see their deviance as
either respectable or aberrant. By most reports, almost every
child engages in some form of delinquent activity during his
legal status as a juvenile, and for those who are arrested,
the differences in expectations suggest some interesting
consequences for sanctioning.

Deterrence is on possible effect of sanctioning, espe-
cially with respectable delinquents. Like their adult counter-
parts, respectable delinquents are usually deterred from
further deviancy by the application of an aberrant label.
Clinard and Quinney (1973), for instance, note that many re-
spectable delinquents, especially those arrested for property
offenses or vandalism, express feelings of remorse or peni-
tence. Apprehension, in other words, leads to the delinquent's
reevaluation of the meaning of his deviance-- "we didn't
think about being caught, we were thinking about having fun;"
"It didn't seem like then it would amount to much;" "I didn't
think it would cause so much trouble." In these instances,
deterrence results from the act of being publicly confronted
with a deviant label that is too discordant with a juvenile's
self image. Aberrant delinquents, on the other hand, are
not as likely to be deterred by sanctioning. Yet there is no
reason to believe that they are never deterred from further
deviance. Since aberrants engage in more "serious" acts of
delinquency, they are likely to generate stern reactions.
If these reactions prove "too much," the aberrant will desist
from further deviance also.

Encouragement for further delinquency is another possible
effect of sanctioning. At this point, the conflict in defini-
tions between delinquents and officials suggests some interest-
ing causal relations. Respectable delinquents, for instance,
may be encouraged by the efforts of juvenile justice officials
to minimize the impact of apprehension and neutralize the

application of criminal labels. But the respectable delin-
quent, not seeing himself as blameless, may interpret this
discretion as ineptness on the part of juvenile officials.
In other words, he may see himself as "conning the system,"
and thus he may be encouraged to commit further delinquency.
Of the two types, aberrant delinquents are the most likely
to be encouraged by the sanctioning originating from involun-
tary systems. If the sanction is too lenient, the aberrant
is provided with a relatively "inexpensive" means of demonstrat-
ing his courage and toughness, or his cunning and savvy to his
peers. Aberrant delinquents, however, are more likely to re-
ceive severe sanctions, and if the sanctions are especially
severe, he is likely to sense or directly experience inequity
in the system (Matza, 1964). In other words, the discretion
invested in juvenile officials is likely to be interpreted
by aberrants as unfair sanctioning, as being "singled out"
for punishment or as being "made an example."

The relations suggested above are objectively possible.
Their description, however, is only the first step in using
these ideal types. Undoubtedly, the juvenile justice system
operates within some combination of aberrant and involuntary
models of deviance. An additional step, therefore, would con-
sist of decomposing the system into those parts and situations
where an aberrant or an involuntary model are usually applied.
Just as the juvenile justice system is more complicated, so
too are the attitudes and definitions that delinquents carry
about themselves and their actions. What modifications are

likely if an upper-class boy is caught committing an aberrant
act? Conversely, what modifications are likely if a lower-
class boy is caught committing a respectable act? All of these
things suggest additional steps needed to fully understand
the utility of the types for the study of juvenile delinquency.

Nevertheless, some of the heuristic potential of these
types has been demonstrated. In light of the ideal types,
labeling's indiscriminate assertion that stigmatizing reactions
cause deviance proves to be greatly oversimplified. With
regard to respectable delinquents, it was suggested that sanc-
tioning usually results in deterrence. And when it does not,
when sanctioning leads to further delinquency, it is because
of the neutralization, not the maximization, of stigmatizing
labels. Even with regard to aberrant delinquents, labeling's
claims are too simplistic. When further delinquency occurs,
it is because of either a sensed injustice or an overly lenient
sanction. While the first reason bares some resemblance to
Lemert's idea of secondary deviance as a role for "attack,"
the second reason suggests something different from labeling's
central tenets. If the application of the ideal types to the
juvenile justice system is any measure of their heuristic
validity, these types should prove helpful in clearing up some
of labeling's conceptual confusion in other areas of deviance
as well.

CONCLUSION

What can be said about the labeling approach? Certainly

it focuses attention on the social aspects of deviance, on

the importance of social definitions and reactions to a com-✓

plete understanding of deviance in modern society. Accord-

ingly, labeling's greatest contribution is that it surpasses

the research interests of earlier practical pursuits-- such

as predicting who will violate parole, who will become delin-

quent or who in general is more likely to commit deviant acts.

In other words, labeling refreshingly redirects research and

theory beyond the legitimate but narrow concern with the causes

of deviant behavior. By focusing on the moral meanings im-

plied in interaction, by deliberately directing studies toward

understanding the significance of social definitions and

reactions, labeling breaks the theoretical silence about social

influences, a silence that has characterized the study of

deviance for too long.

Under the labeling lens, Lemert (1972: 3-25) rightfully

points out, the proper understanding of deviance is a critical ✓

understanding of the larger society and its relationship to

the marginal groups that are singled out by social control as

outsiders. In this sense, if the study of deviance is to be

intellectually serious, it cannot be restricted to the study

of esoteric and exotic groups-- of topless barmaids and
swinging suburbanites, of motorcycle gangs and delinquent
street gangs. Rather the study of crime and deviance must
concern itself with some of the broader social implications of
miscreant behavior. In other words, labeling's concern with
the social meanings of deviance, their differential applica-
tion and their relationship to larger patterns of social order
all suggest a refreshing return to some of the basic issues
proposed by classical social theorists.

In the preceeding paragraph the phrase "proper understand-
ing" is crucial. For in the final analysis, it is against
this standard that labeling must be measured, and it is against
this standard that labeling is found clearly wanting. Critical
understanding, especially the kind espoused by labeling the-
orists, requires conceptual depth and precision-- a quality
that the approach unfortunately lacks. Rather than develop
the issues raised about earlier theories, like the distinction
between deviant acts and deviant labels, labeling theorists
defined the issues away. Rather than develop the causal inter-
actions between initial and secondary deviance, labeling theo-
rists defined away the exceptions. As the critics of the
approach rightfully argue, labeling is excessively loose and
prone to vulgarization; its central claims are often contradic-
tory and almost impossible to empirically verify. Although
the labeling approach locates a crucial traget for research
and theory, it fails to provide the means, the conceptual frame-
work that would adequately aim explanatory efforts.

The last section of this paper presented a strategy for understanding some of these conceptual issues, especially those revolving around the influence of social meanings on deviant behavior. The four ideal types-- respectable, involuntary, aberrant and dissident deviance-- outline four distinct social meanings that are associated with deviance and suggest some interesting relationships. Some of these relationships were demonstrated with regard to dissident behavior and juvenile delinquency, but even a cursory reflection on the types suggests several other areas and possible relationships. In order to explain the social issues highlighted by the labeling approach, in order to at least better understand the complexity of those issues, an exstensive amount of conceptual exploration and elaboration is needed. An ideal type approach, especially as it was outlined by Weber (1949), is quite amenable to these needs.

Nevertheless, there are some logical objections that might be raised about this approach to labeling's conceptual confusion. Ideal types are not a widely accepted methodological strategy. Even in Weber's own time, their use generated some pointed criticisms. In the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Weber (1958) formulated ideal types for both American protestantism and capitalism, and then used the former to explain the latter's occurrence. Several critics (see Tawney's foreward to the 1958 edition) strongly objected to Weber's "exaggerations" of ethical factors. Today, disapproval is all the more likely, since ideal types are not

directly amenable to empirical research. Weber, to recall,
concerned himself with historical trends and their explana-
tions, and considering his topics ideal types were very use-
ful and efficient. On a lower level of abstraction, however,
given the need to operationalize concepts, does not an ideal
type approach fall victim to the same empirical rootlessness
that chracterizes labeling? Does not an ideal type simply
replace one obtuse construct with yet another?

Perhaps. But perceptual bluntness in this instance
would be caused more by the nature of sociology and criminology
than by the strategy itself. A case, although a somewhat
tendentious one, can be made for the assertion that labeling
was originally intended as a heuristic and not an explanatory
framework. This is especially true with regard to Lemert's
(1951; 1967; 1972) writings. In this sense, the approach's
conceptual confusion resulted from the nature of the discipline.
Rather than explore the conceptual relations suggested by
the approach, sociologists and criminologists pushed it into
a neat, unambiguous scientific box-- if A (social reaction)$\sqrt{}$
than B (secondary deviance). In the years surronding Becker's
(1963) Outsiders, most theorists were interested in being
associated with labeling's radical tone; in the years surrond-
ing popular scepticism, most theorists are interested in
being associated with labeling's "pungent and perceptive"
critics. During both periods, few seemed interested in elabo-
rating or salvaging its research tragets. Of course, explor-
ation and elaboration tend to demand more patience, more in

depth analysis than the current need to "publish or perish" might allow. This is to say that the approach, the use of ideal types, rests its utility on the sociological concern to penetrate some complex and difficult problems, and this reliance might well be its most wanting characteristic.

In a sense, all of this argues the importance of research into social definitions, into the subjective meanings attached to behavior. As Weber well understood, the practical types expressed by men and women, the values and goals to which they verbally aspire, often provide insightful points of comparison. This is, of course, the classical methodology, the one that guided the intellectual excitement of such diverse theorists as Marx, Durkheim, Tonnies and Weber in their comparison of desired social values with what actually exists. Such a methodology applied to sociology and criminology itself, might suggest a number of interesting relations, interesting disparities between what is desired and what actually occurs. It might suggest what makes a "good" theory of deviance or what makes a "bad" one; and, of course, it might suggest the utility of using ideal types, or any other heuristic framework for that matter, in sociological and criminological inquiry. But then that is another assessment.

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