

Stoddard Dare – Sociology – 1st Period – Off-Site Learning Packet Day 7

Sociology
Mr. Stoddard Dare
Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Happy April Fool's Day! Did I ever tell you about the year my wife and I gave our kids caramel apples on April Fool's Day, except we substituted onions for apples? It was hilarious!

Today you will be introduced to Labeling Theory, which is the third deviance theory from the Symbolic Interactionist Perspective of Sociology. As you will read, most people reject negative labels, even when they are accurate. The second article details the Techniques of Neutralization people employ to deny negative labels. As you read each technique think about times when you have employed each technique.

- 1) Read "Labeling Theory" and complete the guided reading
- 2) Read "Techniques of Neutralization" and complete the guided reading

Enjoy,

Mr. Stoddard Dare

Labeling Theory

Deviance is any action that is perceived as violating a society's or group's cultural norm. Robbing a store and driving faster than the speed limit are examples of deviant behavior. However, **labeling theory** proposes deviance is socially constructed through reaction instead of action. In other words, according to this theory, no behavior is inherently deviant on its own. Instead, it's the reaction to the behavior that makes it deviant or not.

Labeling theory helps to explain why a behavior is considered negatively deviant to some people, groups, and cultures but positively deviant to others. For example, think about fictional vigilantes, like Robin Hood and Batman. Batman is labeled in different ways depending on the public's reaction to his escapades. Some people have a negative reaction and label him as a criminal. Others have a positive reaction and label him as a hero. Different reactions are typically based on group or cultural norms and values.

Another example is when a person is responsible for the death of another. When are they labeled as a 'murderer' or a 'killer?' The reaction to death sometimes depends on the circumstances. The person responsible will be viewed differently depending on the reason, whether it's murder, war, self-defense, or an accident.

Primary vs. Secondary Deviance

Studies related to labeling theory have also explained how being labeled as deviant can have long-term consequences for a person's social identity. Consider **primary deviance**, which is an initial violation of a social norm - about which no inference is made regarding a person's character. Primary deviance includes minor deviant acts that just about everyone does once or twice, like playing hooky from school or work. These behaviors have little reaction from others and therefore, have little effect on a person's self-concept.

On the other hand, **secondary deviance** is when a person repeatedly violates a social norm, which leads others to make assumptions about that person and assign a label to him or her. Some examples of labels are 'criminal,' 'psycho,' 'addict,' and 'delinquent.' Secondary deviance gets such a strong reaction from others that the individual is typically shunned and excluded from certain social groups.

For example, the dynamic between nerds and jocks is portrayed in popular culture all the time. Typically, there is someone who is intelligent but socially awkward and becomes labeled as a 'nerd.' Once labeled, that person is considered unpopular and shunned by the popular 'jocks.'

Stigma

Once a person has been labeled by others through secondary deviance, it is common for that person to incorporate that label into his or her own self-concept. They develop a **stigma**, or a powerfully negative label that greatly changes a person's self-concept and social identity.

Someone in high school that has been labeled as a nerd, for example, may begin to think of himself or herself as a loser due to other people's opinions and treatment. Someone who has been stigmatized usually has lower self-esteem and may even behave more deviantly as a result of the negative label. The stigmatized person may find it easier to come to terms with the label rather than fight it.

Adopted from: *Study.com*, [Study.com, study.com/academy/lesson/labeling-theory-and-crime-stigma-retrospective-and-projective-labeling.html](https://www.study.com/academy/lesson/labeling-theory-and-crime-stigma-retrospective-and-projective-labeling.html).

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Labeling Theory

- 1) What is Deviance?

- 2) According to Labeling Theory, what makes an action deviant?

- 3) Provide an original example of how one behavior can be labeled deviant by some people, but a positive behavior by others.

- 4) What is Primary Deviance and provide an example?

- 5) What is Secondary Deviance and provide an example?

- 6) According to Labeling Theory, what happens to people that commit secondary deviance?

- 7) What is a Stigma?

- 8) Explain how a Stigma becomes a part of a person's self-concept.

Techniques of Neutralization

Okay everyone, time for a test. Raise your right hand if you've ever done something that went against your value system, that harmed others, or was otherwise just wrong. Now, raise your left hand if you still think that you're a pretty good, moral person. My guess is that most of us have both of our hands in the air at this point (in fact, I'm having to type with my nose).

This raises an interesting question. How can we, or anyone who breaks society's moral codes, still think of ourselves as moral members of society? David Matza and Gresham Sykes developed a theory to explain this, called "techniques of neutralization."

Here's how it works. Society has various expectations of how we're supposed to act. We can call these norms. As part of the socialization process, we internalize these norms, coming to hold them as our own values and beliefs. People who are unable to internalize them are shunned and sometimes even considered psychopaths. When we break the moral code, then, we need some way of justifying it to ourselves so that we see ourselves--and can present ourselves to others--as full-fledged, moral members of society. We need something like a get-out-of-jail free card in the game monopoly, something that will cover our wrong-doing so that we don't suffer the consequences of being defined as immoral or apart from society in our actions.

Techniques of neutralization do just this by providing simple and powerful rationales for why we violate society's norms, and we use them to explain to ourselves and others why it was "okay" that we do wrong. Matza and Sykes identified five separate techniques of neutralization:

- 1) *Denial of responsibility.* We acknowledge doing the behavior considered wrong, but we claim that we had no choice—that we had to do or we were forced to do so.
- 2) *Denial of injury.* We acknowledge doing the wrong action, but we claim that no one was harmed by what we did, so it really shouldn't be a problem.
- 3) *Blaming the victim.* We acknowledge that people were hurt by our actions, but we claim that though we did the action, it was really the victim's fault—they brought about or otherwise deserved our behavior.
- 4) *Condemn the condemners.* We abdicate all responsibility for our behavior, and instead we point to the people condemning us. They are the problem, not us. What they have done wrong excuses our behavior.
- 5) *Appealing to a higher loyalty.* We claim that while we violated some social norms, we're actually adhering to other norms and loyalties, and these higher principles justify our behavior.

It's pretty straightforward to illustrate these techniques using everyday wrongdoing. Suppose that you cheat on a test. You could deny responsibility. Rather than redefine yourself as a

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cheater, you might decide that you really had no choice—you just have to graduate this semester.

You can deny the injury. You could also say that you did cheat, but it didn't hurt anyone. If the professor doesn't use a strict grading curve, then bumping up your test score won't change anyone else's score, so what's the harm?

You could blame the victim. If the professor hadn't made his/her tests so confusing, you wouldn't need to cheat, so it really is their fault. You could condemn the condemners. Who is the college faculty and administration to make a big case out of cheating—we all know that they cheat at their jobs.

Finally, you could appeal to a higher loyalty. Maybe you didn't really want to cheat, but your parents are counting on you to graduate and get a good job, and for that you need a good grade point average. As such, you did it for them.

What's truly remarkable about these techniques of neutralization is that they are used with even the most heinous of crimes.

Josef Fritzl held his daughter as a sex slave in a basement dungeon for over twenty years. He fathered seven children by her, ranging in age from five to nineteen at the time of Fritzl's arrest, and none of them had ever seen sunlight! Fritzl was only discovered when one of the older children fell gravely ill, and they sought medical help.

What was Fritzl's response to this hideous crime? He denied the injury, explaining that he could have let the older child die, but instead he risked discovery to get her help. Certainly, he should get some credit for that, no?

Let's take an even worse case. Adolf Eichmann was an SS officer in Nazi Germany. He was placed in charge of the logistics of Hitler's final solution--the mass extermination of Jews--so Eichmann was responsible for the murder of millions of people. If ever someone should just fess up to being a monster, it should be Eichmann, but that's not what happened. When he was brought to trial, he simply denied responsibility and said that he was just obeying orders.

"Why me," he asked. "Why not the local policemen, thousands of them? They would have been shot if they had refused to round up the Jews for the death camps. Why not hang them for not wanting to be shot? Why me? Everybody killed the Jews."

These are pretty extreme examples of people using techniques of neutralization to justify their actions. Can you think of any others?

Wright, Bradley. *Techniques of Neutralization*. Everyday Sociology. 26 Oct. 2008:
<https://www.everydaysociologyblog.com/2008/10/techniques-of-n.html>

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Techniques of Neutralization

- 1) Who were credited with identifying the five Techniques of Neutralization?

- 2) What happens to people that are unable to internalize social norms?

- 3) What is the purpose of the Techniques of Neutralization?

- 4) For each of the 5 Techniques of Neutralization provide an original example of how you can use each technique to justify your behavior. I am not looking for a definition, rather application of knowledge.
 - A) Denial of Responsibility:

 - B) Denial of Injury:

 - C) Denial of Victim:

 - D) Condemnation of the Condemners:

 - e) Appeal to Higher Loyalties: