Labeling Theory/
Power & Deviance

March 7, 2008

http://www.public.iastate.edu/~soc.134
Labeling theory

✓ Labeling theory: theory which states that deviance is the consequence of the application of rules and sanctions to an offender; a deviant is an individual to whom the identity “deviant” has been successfully applied

✓ Two types of deviance
  • Primary deviance: routine instances of norm violation that may or may not result in labeling
  • Secondary deviance: deviance following and resulting from the label

✓ Reasons why label may lead to deviance
  1. Cut off from participation in conventional groups
  2. Treatment may produce increasing deviance
  3. Labeled person may believe the label
The Saints and the Roughnecks

- Participant observation study by William Chambliss
- Shows role of class in labeling
- Saints
  - Eight white, upper-middle class boys
  - Constantly occupied with truancy, drinking, theft & vandalism
  - Never arrested
- Roughnecks
  - Six white, lower class boys
  - Engaged in fighting, drinking and theft; less delinquent overall
  - Constantly in trouble with police & community
The Saints and the Roughnecks

Why were the Saints and Roughnecks treated differently?

- Visibility: Saints owned their own cars and were able to leave town
- Demeanor: Saints were apologetic and penitent; Roughnecks hostile and disdainful
- Bias: Community is biased against type of delinquency committed by Roughnecks

The delinquent label reinforced the Roughneck’s delinquency

Predictions about boys’ futures were correct
Power and deviance

✓ Conflict perspective: defining and punishing deviance is form of social control by “haves” against “have-nots”
  • “Have-nots” are more likely to be labeled and punished for crime
✓ Our legal system doesn’t protect us equally from the dangers to us from rich people and poor people
  • Reiman: Label “crime” refers not to actions that cause most misery and suffering, but primarily to dangerous actions of the poor
✓ Corporate crime: Estimated cost of white-collar crime (e.g., fraud, embezzlement) in 2000 was $404 billion (vs. $3.8 billion for burglary & robbery)
✓ Health care: “preventable medical errors” resulted in 98,000 deaths and 1 million injuries to hospitalized Americans and cost $29 billion
✓ Workplace safety: Reiman estimates over 30,000 annual deaths from occupational disease and hazard (Newman: 56,000 deaths)
## How are Americans murdered?

### How Americans Are Murdered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total (weapon known)</th>
<th>Firearms</th>
<th>Knife or Other Cutting Instrument</th>
<th>Other Weapon: Club, Arson, Poison, Strangulation, etc.</th>
<th>Personal Weapon: Hands, Fists, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12,943</td>
<td>8,393</td>
<td>1,743</td>
<td>1,815</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How Americans Are Really Murdered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total (weapon known)</th>
<th>Occupational hazard &amp; disease</th>
<th>Knife or other cutting instrument including scalpel</th>
<th>Firearms</th>
<th>Other weapon: club, poison, strangulation, prescription drug, other medical treatment.</th>
<th>Personal weapon: hands, fists, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94,681</td>
<td>30,238</td>
<td>13,743</td>
<td>8,493</td>
<td>41,315</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jeffrey Reiman’s (2001) *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*
Rate of black incarceration in Iowa is 6X higher than white rate; blacks make up 2.3 of Iowans but 23.7% of new prison inmates (*Des Moines Register*, 10-5-07)

Black children are 5% of Iowa’s public school children but make up approx. 22% of suspensions and expulsions (*Des Moines Register* 10-7-07)

What’s going on?

- Poverty & race are connected in the U.S. so many apparent race effects are really poverty effects
- Whites and blacks are perceived differently by social control decision makers

Participant observation studies of schools have found that school staff show greater concern for behavior by non-white students that transgresses white middle-class standards, e.g., untucked shirts, sexy dancing, boisterous talking.

Studies of traffic stops show that blacks are more likely to be targeted by police

Criminal sentencing policies, e.g, the 100-to-1 rule, disproportionately harm blacks (even though blacks and whites probably use and sell drugs at similar rates)

Historically, U.S. drug laws have been linked to race and class
Three profile stop studies

**Illinois’ Project Valkyrie (1987-97)**
- Latinos < 8% of IL population; 27% of searches
- Blacks < 15% of IL population; 23% of searches
- Cops ask to search Latinos’ cars more than whites’, but find lower % of contraband

**Maryland State Police (1995-96)**
- Blacks make up 16.9% of drivers on I-95 & 17.5% of traffic violators, but account for 72.9% of searches
- Whites: drivers, 75.6%; violators, 74.4%; searches, 19.7%

**New Jersey (1999)**
- Blacks & Latinos: 13.5 % of drivers, 77% of searches
Scapegoating the young

✓ Violent crime
  • Teenagers commit just 13% of violent crime
  • They are more likely to be victims than offenders

✓ Drug use
  • Most drug users are adults, but teenagers are more likely to be arrested

✓ Results of scapegoating teenagers
  • Status offenses that apply only to young
  • Constitutional rights of young ignored
  • Youth culture targeted for censorship
  • Youths given harsher punishments than adults
  • Offenders against children receive lenient sentences

Source: Mike A. Males’ The Scapegoat Generation